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Monday, 27 July 2009, 10 a.m.

New York

President:	Mr. Rugunda	(Uganda)
Members:	Austria	Mr. Mayr-Harting
	Burkina Faso	Mr. Koudougou
	China	Mr. Liu Zhenmin
	Costa Rica	Mr. Urbina
	Croatia	Mr. Vilović
	France	Mr. Lacroix
	Japan	Mr. Okuda
	Libyan Arab Jamahiriya	Mr. Shalgham
	Mexico	Mr. Heller
	Russian Federation	Mr. Churkin
	Turkey	Mr. Çorman
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Mr. Quarrey
	United States of America	Mr. Wolff
	Viet Nam	Mr. Le Luong Minh

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

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The meeting was called to order at 10.15 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

The President: I should like to inform the Council that I have received letters from the representatives of Bangladesh, Brazil, Cuba, Ecuador, Egypt, Indonesia, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Malaysia, Morocco, Nicaragua, Norway, Pakistan, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, Sweden, Switzerland, the Syrian Arab Republic and Tunisia, in which they request to be invited to participate in the consideration of the item on the Council's agenda. In conformity with the usual practice, I propose, with the consent of the Council, to invite those representatives to participate in the consideration of the item, without the right to vote, in accordance with the relevant provisions of the Charter and rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure.

There being no objection, it is so decided.

At the invitation of the President, Mr. Weissbrod (Israel) took a seat at the Council table; the representatives of the other aforementioned countries took the seats reserved for them at the side of the Council Chamber.

The President: I should like to inform the Council that I have received a letter dated 22 July 2009 from the Permanent Observer of Palestine to the United Nations, which will be issued as document S/2009/380 and which reads as follows:

> "I have the honour to request that, in accordance with its previous practice, the Security Council invite the Permanent Observer of Palestine to the United Nations to participate in the meeting of the Security Council which will be held on Monday, 27 July 2009, regarding the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question."

I propose, with the consent of the Council, to invite the Permanent Observer of Palestine to participate in the meeting, in accordance with the rules of procedure and the previous practice in this regard.

There being no objection, it is so decided.

At the invitation of the President, Mr. Mansour (Palestine) took a seat at the Council table.

The President: In accordance with the understanding reached in the Council's prior consultations, I shall take it that the Security Council agrees to extend an invitation under rule 39 of its provisional rules of procedure to Mr. Oscar Fernandez-Taranco, Assistant Secretary-General for Political Affairs.

There being no objection, it is so decided.

I extend a warm welcome to Mr. Fernandez-Taranco.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda. The Security Council is meeting in accordance with the understanding reached in its prior consultations.

At this meeting, the Council will hear a briefing by Mr. Oscar Fernandez-Taranco, to whom I now give the floor.

Mr. Fernandez-Taranco: It is a pleasure for me to brief the Council for the first time as Assistant Secretary-General for Political Affairs. Since the Council was last briefed by the Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, on 23 June 2009 (see S/PV.6150), there have been concerted efforts by the international community to create the conditions for the prompt resumption and early conclusion of negotiations to reach the end goal of a two-State solution.

On 26 June, the Secretary-General joined other members of the Quartet at a meeting in Trieste, which was followed by a meeting with Foreign Ministers of the Follow-up Committee of the League of Arab States on the Arab Peace Initiative. The Quartet underscored that the only viable solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is one that ends the occupation that begin in 1967 and fulfils the aspirations of both parties for independent homelands though two States for two peoples: Israel and an independent, contiguous and viable State of Palestine, living side by side in peace and security. All Quartet members affirmed their determination to continue actively and vigorously to seek a comprehensive solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict.

At Trieste, United States Special Envoy George Mitchell briefed both the Quartet and the Arab foreign ministers on the United States intensive efforts with all parties throughout the region. He stressed that the objective was peace and not yet another process. I am sure that all Council members are aware that Senator Mitchell will be visiting the region for the fifth time later this week, as are a number of senior United States officials. The Quartet envoys will also meet in Jerusalem at the end of this month to actively follow up with the parties to promote the implementation of Quartet positions and formulate recommendations for Quartet action.

There was strong agreement among Quartet members that both Israel and the Palestinians should implement their obligations under the Road Map, and they urged the Government of Israel to freeze all settlement activity, including natural growth. I regret to report that illegal settlement activity is continuing across the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and that there was no evacuation of settlement outposts during the reporting period. The situation in East Jerusalem is of particular concern due to the developments on the ground, especially indications of new settlement construction and house demolitions.

The international community expressed its concern following the Jerusalem municipality planning committee's approval of the construction of 20 new housing units on the site of the Shepherd Hotel in the East Jerusalem neighbourhood of Sheikh Jarrah. On 19 July, in the Wadi Joz neighbourhood of East Jerusalem, at the homes of two families that have received eviction orders, Special Coordinator Serry met with representatives of the European Union Troika and other members of the international community in order to express their concern at the plight of the families and at the prospect of new settlement construction in East Jerusalem. The homes are part of a neighbourhood of 26 Palestinian refugee families that all the face the threat of eviction.

In a significant development yesterday, settlers accompanied by Israeli security forces took physical possession of a house in another area of Sheikh Jarrah. Demolition orders for Palestinian construction without a permit were carried out against three Palestinian homes during the reporting period and a further 13 new orders were issued. Palestinian institutions in East Jerusalem remain closed by Israeli order, and on 15 July a community centre in East Jerusalem was closed. These unilateral actions in highly sensitive areas of East Jerusalem increase tensions and undermine confidence in the basis for the two-State solution. The position of the Secretary-General is clear — the future of Jerusalem remains a matter for final status negotiations between the parties.

In the reporting period, there were 51 incidents in which 19 Palestinians were injured and property was vandalized by settlers. Two Israelis were also injured in these incidents. On 20 July, settlers injured two Palestinians and set fire to agricultural land in the village of Burin. There continues to be inadequate enforcement of the rule of law on violent settlers.

This reporting period marks five years since an advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice stated that construction of the wall within occupied Palestinian territory is contrary to international law. The construction of the barrier has compounded movement restrictions in the West Bank, and its planned route includes some 9.5 per cent of the area of the West Bank. Approximately 58 per cent of the barrier in its current planned route has been completed, and construction is ongoing.

The Quartet principals agreed that transformative change on the ground should form an integral and essential part of the agenda for peace. In this respect, there were some improvements in the West Bank in the reporting period. Israel has implemented a number of measures to ease movement between Nablus, Qalqilya, Ramallah and Jericho. Initial field observations indicate that these measures have significantly reduced the amount of time required for Palestinians to access these cities.

The Government of Israel has also announced that the hours for commercial crossing at the Allenby Bridge to Jordan will be increased and that it will promote the development of three key industrial zones in Bethlehem, Jenin and Jericho. These welcome steps by Israel, if sustained and expanded, would have a significant impact on Palestinian freedom of movement and on economic development.

There are now a total of 613 closure obstacles within the West Bank. This figure has been jointly confirmed for the first time following cooperation by the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) Central Command and the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, including detailed cross-checking and a series of joint field trips.

In a difficult context, the Palestinian Authority has continued to pursue an ambitious reform agenda. From the establishment of a national credit bureau to the modernization of the legal framework for investment, a number of measures are being implemented to strengthen the foundations for socio-economic sustainability. I reiterate the call of the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee and the Quartet for robust and sustained financial support for the Palestinian Authority.

However, the fiscal situation of the Palestinian Authority remains dire. The International Monetary Fund estimates that $900 million in external financing are still needed for the remainder of the year, including $300 million to respond to needs in Gaza. It is essential that donor countries fulfil all pledges made at Paris in December 2007 and Sharm el-Sheikh in March this year.

As the Quartet also noted in its meeting in Trieste, the Palestinian Authority has made important steps to reform its security sector. Members of the judicial police completed a training course on 5 July, and the renovation of prisons is under way in several West Bank cities. Five police stations are also being constructed in Jenin governorate. Palestinian forces are now free to operate at night in four West Bank cities following improved coordination with Israel.

The situation was generally calm in the West Bank and there were no fatalities recorded during the reporting period, although 19 Palestinians and 10 Israelis were injured. Israeli security forces continued to arrest Palestinians, but in lower numbers than in previous periods. In a disturbing development, on 4 July a Palestinian Authority official reported that Palestinian security forces had uncovered arms, explosives and $8.5 million in cash from Hamas cells in the West Bank. I urge the Palestinian Authority to continue to make every effort to improve law and order and to fight violent extremism, consistent with its Road Map obligations.

The Secretary-General shared with the Quartet his belief that the situation in Gaza is unsustainable and not in the interests of any of those concerned. Security Council resolution 1860 (2009) remains the main framework for the way forward in Gaza. The notable and welcome drop in violence reported in the most recent briefing has continued into this reporting period. However, there were four incidents of rockets or mortars being fired into Israel during the past month and nine Israeli army incursions into the Gaza Strip, in which two Palestinian children were killed and seven Palestinians injured. A reported seven Palestinians were killed today when a tunnel used for smuggling collapsed. No mechanism has been put in place to prevent the illicit trafficking in arms and ammunition in Gaza.

I would like to stress that the Quartet called for a sustained reopening of all crossing points to ensure the regular flow of people and humanitarian and commercial goods into Gaza. A few categories of goods, including small quantities of cement and glass, prohibited for import since June 2007, were allowed into Gaza on an exceptional basis during the reporting period. Overall, an average of 78 trucks per days were allowed into Gaza, an increase from approximately 70 trucks per day in June and a marked increase from the 18 trucks per day in November 2008.

However, in May 2007, prior to the imposition of the comprehensive closure regime, 475 trucks per day were entering Gaza as part of normal commerce and trade. About 70 per cent of imports during the reporting period were human and animal food products while most industrial, agricultural and construction materials were either prohibited or severely restricted. No exports were allowed out of Gaza during this period.

Over the past month, the amount of industrial fuel entering Gaza through the crossing points was sufficient to meet approximately 70 per cent of the quantities needed for Gaza power plants to operate at full capacity. Power cuts continued throughout the Gaza Strip, directly affecting most households' ability to refrigerate foods, as well as the provision of essential services like water and sanitation, health care and storage of medicine as well as waste disposal. Due to the lack of materials needed to fix damage sustained to the network during Operation Cast Lead, some 10 per cent of the population in Gaza remained without any electricity at all.

It is important to note that the tunnel economy continues in Gaza, with smuggling providing an increasingly broad range of consumer goods, and of black market petrol in particular. The alternative tunnel network has alleviated some of the shortages, but it cannot be a substitute for a healthy and functioning economy based on the free movement of goods.

The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East has opened more than a 150 summer camps in Gaza which are being attended by over 185,000 children. Under the coordination of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), efforts to clear over 600,000 tons of rubble have begun. In support of UNDP efforts, the United Nations Mine Action Team for Gaza has received its special explosive ordnance disposal equipment but still waits for delivery of special explosives to destroy unexploded ordnance.

No significant amounts of materials for reconstruction have been allowed into Gaza and I reiterate the Secretary-General's position that this situation is completely unacceptable. In Trieste, the Quartet has expressed it support for the United Nations proposal to kick-start early recovery in Gaza by opening the crossings for materials to complete United Nations construction work on housing, health and education facilities suspended since June 2007. We call on Israel for a prompt and positive response to this proposal.

A further, inconclusive round of talks aimed at reconciling Fatah and Hamas was also held in Cairo on 28 June. Egyptian efforts have now been put on hold, at President Abbas's request, to enable Fatah to focus their efforts on their reform efforts at the upcoming Fatah Congress, scheduled for 4 August in Bethlehem. The factions are due to meet again in Cairo on 25 August.

Meanwhile, Hamas continues to assert its control over the Strip and maintains a visible police presence in public places. On 9 July, in a new development for Gazan society, the Hamas Chief Justice in Gaza instituted a rule that women lawyers must wear a traditional gown and head covering in court. Intra-Palestinian relations remain tense and on 21 July, a bomb injured 61 people at a wedding in Khan Younis.

Fatah claims that nearly 200 of its members in Gaza have been detained over the course of the reporting period. Fatah has also expressed its concern that its members in Gaza will be prevented from attending its sixth Congress in Bethlehem.

On 14 July, the new Israeli negotiator met in Cairo with his Egyptian counterpart to discuss prospects for the release of Israeli captive Gilad Shalit in exchange for a number of the 11,000 Palestinian prisoners held in Israeli jails. The International Committee of the Red Cross has still not been granted access to Shalit after his more than three years in captivity.

Justice Goldstone returned to Gaza on 28 June to conduct two days of public hearings with victims and relatives of the Cast Lead Operation. On 6 July, similar hearings were held in Geneva, during which witnesses and victims from the West Bank and southern Israel testified, including Noam Shalit, the father of captured Israeli soldier Gilad Shalit. This mission's report will be presented to the Human Rights Council in August, for discussion at the Council's next session in September.

In the region, Arab League foreign ministers met in Cairo on 24 June and welcomed a new beginning for United States relations with the Arab and Muslim world and President Obama's commitment to exert every effort towards comprehensive peace in the region. The foreign ministers emphasized the importance of a complete Israeli settlement freeze and the need to lift the blockade of the Gaza Strip as two key elements to create the necessary climate for the resumption of peace negotiations.

The Quartet took note of the Arab League statement and expressed support for dialogue among all States in the region in the spirit of the Arab Peace Initiative. The Quartet called on Arab States to take steps to recognize Israel's rightful place in the region, to affirm that violence cannot achieve regional peace and security, and to assist the Palestinian people in building their future State through consistent support for the Palestinian Authority.

The situation in the occupied Syrian Golan remained quiet during the reporting period, although settlement activity continues.

Turning now to Lebanon, allow me to recall that Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations, Mr. Alain Le Roy, briefed the Council on 23 July on recent violations of resolution 1701 (2006) that had taken place in South Lebanon. Investigations are still ongoing into some of these violations.

In addition, on 8 July, one Lebanese civilian crossed the Blue Line near Sheikh Abbad tomb and was arrested by the IDF. He was handed over to the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) the following morning. During the month, Israeli air violations took place almost daily.

In meetings with Lebanese and Israeli officials and political leaders in the past week, the United Nations Special Coordinator for Lebanon, Mr. Michael Williams stressed the seriousness of these recent events and the gravity of the violations to resolution 1701 (2006) that had taken place as well as the need to de-escalate the situation. With Lebanese leaders, he requested that there be no further incursions by Lebanese civilians across the Blue Line. Mr. Williams was reassured by Prime Minister Siniora, Speaker Berri and Prime Minister-designate Hariri that no further demonstrations would take place in the area. A senior member from Hizbullah also gave the same reassurances.

In a further effort to defuse the situation, Mr. Williams visited Israel on 23 July where he raised the question of the newly-erected watchtower in Kfar Shouba and requested that it be removed. An immediate priority is for all parties to refrain from any provocative actions that could spiral into undesirable results.

Even as we await the outcome of the investigation into the recent events, UNIFIL will continue to coordinate closely with the Lebanese armed forces to ensure that the situation in UNIFIL's area of operation remains under control in line with resolution 1701 (2006).

On the Lebanese side, the challenge ahead remains the formation of a new Government after parliamentary elections on 7 June. We hope that ongoing negotiations over the formation of the Government will proceed as expeditiously as possible. The recent incidents in South Lebanon have been a stark reminder of how quickly and dangerously the situation can deteriorate. Despite the seriousness of those incidents, however, we remain hopeful that we can move towards full implementation of resolution 1701 (2006) and towards greater security and stability in the Middle East.

Now is the time for Israel, the Palestinians and all actors in the region to play their part to end the Arab-Israeli conflict and to create a better future for all in the Middle East. The Quartet will meet on the margins of the General Assembly in New York in September, and there will also be a meeting of the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee. We continue to support the convening of an international conference in Moscow in 2009.

We remain determined to actively and vigorously seek a comprehensive resolution to the Arab-Israeli conflict on the basis of Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973), 1397 (2002), 1515 (2003) and 1850 (2008), the Madrid framework, including the principle of land for peace, the Road Map and agreements previously reached between the parties.

The President: I thank Mr. Fernandez-Taranco for his briefing.

In accordance with the understanding reached among Council members, I wish to remind all speakers to limit their statements to no more than five minutes in order to enable the Council to carry out its work expeditiously. Delegations with lengthy statements are kindly requested to circulate the texts in writing and to deliver a condensed version when speaking in the Chamber.

I shall now give the floor to members of Security Council.

Mr. Shalgham (Libyan Arab Jamahiriya) (*spoke in Arabic*): Allow me at the outset to express my appreciation to Mr. Oscar Fernandez-Taranco for his briefing, which clearly shows the extent of the deteriorating situation and the danger posed to the occupied Palestinian territories and to security and stability in the region.

Despite the fact that more than six months have elapsed since the Israeli forces perpetrated their massacre in the Gaza Strip and the Security Council adopted resolution 1860 (2009), we still cannot see any sign that the occupying authorities intend to change their inhuman behaviour towards the civilians in the Gaza Strip. For the third consecutive year, we see their lack of will to end the siege and the blockade, to open the border crossings closed under a policy of collective punishment that runs counter to all international and humanitarian law, and to desist from committing grave violations in the occupied Palestinian territories, some of which easily qualify as war crimes under international law and international humanitarian law.

Nor do we see any sign of international will to break the world's silence and pressure the occupation authorities to put an end to the suffering of civilians in the Gaza Strip. That silence has encouraged the occupation forces to commit yet more crimes and to intensify their practices, behaving like a State that is above the law.

At this juncture, we would like to commend the role of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East and the efforts made by its personnel in the face of threats and danger. We strongly condemn all aggression against its personnel and the false accusations levelled against them by the occupation forces.

Conditions in the West Bank are no better than those in the Gaza Strip, which shows that, despite Israel's allegations and pretexts with regard to the Gaza Strip, Israeli officials have not ceased to declare their intention to continue expanding their settlement activities and to apply policies that seek to rapidly Judaize Jerusalem by confiscating identity cards and land. Meanwhile, the settlers continue their crimes against Palestinian civilians in the occupied West Bank, which more often than not are committed with the help and support of the occupation forces, which protect them while ignoring the complaints of Palestinian civilians.

Those measures have been intensified by the continued construction of the racist separation wall despite the advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice and by blockades of ring roads and the bypass roads that cut across the West Bank. The land that has been taken from the West Bank as a result of the settlements, the ring roads and the separation wall totals 2,703 square kilometres, which constitutes 46 per cent of the whole area of the West Bank. Yet, we still talk about the establishment of a Palestinian State at a time when 46 per cent of the West Bank has been taken by the Israelis and their settlers.

I would like to mention the situation of Palestinian detainees and prisoners, especially women. Here, I refer to the report adopted by the United Nations Development Fund for Women, which refers to the grave and distressing situation of female Palestinian prisoners in Israeli detention centres. The report says that most of them are exposed to psychological and mental pressure and torture, including insults, beatings, threats and sexual harassment. The report also states that 13 per cent of these female prisoners are under the age of 18.

Any serious effort to achieve peace in the Middle East must start by putting an end to the international silence with regard to Israel. This means that the international community should not fear Israel but should dare to call on it to freeze all settlement activities and to halt and remove all settlements. The Council has been silent, which has encouraged Israel to continue those policies. It has rejected any mention of a racist State, instead talking about a Jewish Israeli State, and it has failed to condemn the enactment of new laws against the Arab people. That threatens a new *Nakba*, lays the groundwork for the transfer and displacement of 1.5 million Palestinians from land occupied in 1948 and denies the right of Palestinian refugees to return under international law and international resolutions.

Mr. Le Luong Minh (Viet Nam): At the outset, I would like to thank Assistant Secretary-General Fernandez-Taranco for his detailed and comprehensive briefing, his first before the Council.

Over the past six months the situation in the Middle East has remained worrisome. Almost no progress has been made on the implementation of Security Council resolutions 1850 (2008) and 1860 (2009). Despite an announced ceasefire, incursions by the Israeli armed forces into the occupied Palestinian territory continued; Israeli imposition of restrictions and blockades continued to inflict untold psychological, physical and humanitarian damage upon the very fabric of the civilian population in Gaza and adversely affected reconstruction efforts by United Nations agencies and the international donor community. Israel's increased construction of settlements in the West Bank and its ongoing pursuit of the separation wall threatened to alter the legal status, demographic composition and character of the Palestinian territories before final status negotiations could resume. And Israeli civilians continued to fall victim to rocket attacks.

In the face of that situation, we welcome the intensified diplomatic efforts and the broad consensus among the Quartet, Arab League members, regional countries and the international community at large on the pressing need for early resumption of a fully fledged peace process on all tracks. We also welcome the undertakings of the Palestinian Government to consolidate progress in revitalizing the socio-economic infrastructure, developing an effective security structure and establishing functional institutions for a future State. Those positive developments give us a sense of guarded optimism.

For more than six decades, the Middle East has been suffering from protracted hostilities and has fallen

short of achieving a steady state of peace, stability and prosperity. Violence and counter-violence will not contribute to a just, lasting and comprehensive peace in the region which could ensure Israel's security and achievement of the Palestinians' ultimate goal of setting up an independent and viable State of their own. Peaceful settlement of disputes, constructive dialogue and good-faith negotiations can and should be the only option to help bridge the rift and cultivate confidence between the parties, which is so essential after years of disruptive mistrust and confrontation.

Viet Nam continues to support the Road Map, the Madrid terms of reference, the Arab Peace Initiative, and it calls for strict implementation of the relevant Security Council resolutions. We urge the new Israeli Government to stay the course towards settling the crisis on the basis of a two-State solution, freeze illegal settlement activity, dismantle outposts erected since March 2001, allow unhindered access of humanitarian assistance, open all border crossings and resolve the fate of all Palestinian prisoners. We also urge the Palestinian factions to promote national reconciliation and to rally behind the Palestinian National Authority in preparation for the establishment of a national unity government and future statehood. We commend the role played by the Arab countries in that regard.

To relieve the suffering of the people in Gaza, we call upon the parties concerned to strictly abide by international humanitarian and human rights law and extend necessary cooperation to relief operations being conducted by United Nations agencies and humanitarian organizations.

While welcoming the successful conduct of the parliamentary elections in Lebanon early last month, we remain concerned, however, about the recent security incidents in south Lebanon and support the investigation process carried out by the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon and the Lebanese Armed Forces. At this critical juncture, we underline the importance of maximum restraint among the parties and the assurance of safety and security for United Nations peacekeepers, humanitarian workers and the local population. We urge Israel to cease flights over Lebanese territory and to withdraw from the northern part of Ghajar village and an adjacent area north of the Blue Line. We continue to support collective efforts aimed at ensuring full implementation of resolution 1701 (2006).

Mr. Okuda (Japan): I would first like to thank you, Mr. President, for convening today's open debate on the situation in the Middle East. I would also like to thank Assistant Secretary-General Fernandez-Taranco for his briefing.

It has been six months since the conflict in Gaza. While there has not been any major outbreak of violence since then, neither has there been any political breakthrough towards lasting peace. We believe that the current situation of no peace, no war is not sustainable. We must do everything possible to realize real peace.

We cannot overstate the importance of the two-State solution. This can only be achieved through negotiation, and violence has no place in the process. Japan strongly supports a comprehensive solution on the basis of relevant Security Council resolutions including resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 1850 (2008), the Madrid principles, including land for peace, and the Road Map.

In this regard, we reiterate our call on both the Israelis and the Palestinians to fulfil their obligations under the Road Map and refrain from any action that might prejudge the outcome of negotiations. We urge the Israelis to freeze their settlement activities, including so-called natural growth in the West Bank and East Jerusalem. In this regard, we are concerned about the project of the construction of Jewish residences in East Jerusalem.

Improving the humanitarian conditions in Gaza continues to be an important priority. We call on the Israelis to further cooperate with the international efforts in that regard by keeping the crossings open continuously to secure the smooth movement of the relevant people and goods. We also call on all parties to fully implement Security Council resolution 1860 (2009) to resolve the issues surrounding Gaza. To increase this momentum, Japan has been making efforts to alleviate the devastated humanitarian conditions. This month, we have decided to provide a total of $10 million in assistance, including food aid through the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East and the World Food Programme and the project for prevention of infectious diseases through UNICEF.

We take note of the removal of some of the restrictions on movement and access in the West Bank by the Government of Prime Minister Netanyahu. We

encourage the Israelis and the Palestinians to strengthen their security cooperation, which will enable further relaxation of restrictions on movement and access.

Palestinian reconciliation is essential. We support Palestinian unity under the leadership of President Abbas and call on the Palestinians to work vigorously to achieve it. In this context, we hope that the Fatah Congress will be a success. We fully support Egypt's efforts and ask that any country in the region with influence cooperate in this endeavour.

Japan has consistently provided assistance to the Palestinians since the Oslo Accord of 1993. Building a viable economy for the Palestinians is an indispensable component of a future Palestinian State. Japan will continue to do as much as possible in that regard.

We welcome and support the renewed and intensified efforts of the Obama Administration of the United States to achieve comprehensive peace in the region. The serious efforts of the United States are creating an opportunity, which we have not seen in some time, to realize the long-sought goal of achieving comprehensive peace among all parties in the region, including Syria and Lebanon. However, we cannot let the United States alone shoulder all of the responsibilities. The parties themselves, as well as the international community, must also shoulder their responsibilities if we are to achieve peace.

We fully support the Arab Peace Initiative, which can be a basis for a comprehensive peace in the region, and believe that all the Arab States can play a more active role in ameliorating the atmosphere surrounding the peace talks. We hope that they will take tangible steps towards that end.

People in the region have seen various peace initiatives come and go. We must not let the people feel apathetic towards these renewed efforts. We should seize this opportunity as if it were our last. Japan is determined to help both parties reinvigorate the peace process. Ambassador Yutaka Iimura, the newly appointed Special Envoy of the Government of Japan for the Middle East peace process, will work with the parties to achieve a comprehensive peace in the region.

Mr. Heller (Mexico) (*spoke in Spanish*): I would like to thank Assistant Secretary-General Oscar Fernandez-Taranco for his briefing today on the situation in the Middle East. I would also like to thank the Permanent Representative of Israel for being with us as well as the Permanent Observer of the Palestinian Authority.

The open debate today on the situation in the Middle East is taking place within the framework of important diplomatic initiatives aimed at providing a new impetus to the peace process. After the conflict and political transition period which characterized the region during the first half of this year, the time has come for dialogue and negotiation.

Mexico hopes that during the second half of 2009 tangible progress will be achieved in the peace process, which will lead us towards the objective that has been endorsed by the international community — the establishment of a Palestinian State living in peace with Israel within secure and internationally recognized borders.

That is why we welcome the diplomatic initiative undertaken by the President of the United States, Barack Obama, in the Middle East, as well as the important message he gave during his recent talk in Cairo on 4 June.

We have also taken note of the fact that Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has acknowledged the need for the establishment of a Palestinian State. However, in our view, the significant preconditions and in some cases very restrictive conditions that have been imposed for achieving this objective only run the risk of further complicating the negotiation process and a future settlement. We hope that this initiative will be a first step in the right direction, which will allow all political sectors in Israel to be involved in the negotiating process.

Similarly, we welcome the statement made by the Quartet in Trieste on 26 June, in which the determination of the international community to support the parties in the negotiation process and to implement the resulting agreement was reiterated. Mexico supports this statement which has a renewed appeal to the parties to comply with their obligations under the road map and to work together for a two-State solution.

We hope that these diplomatic initiatives will generate the right conditions for the holding, at an appropriate time, of an international conference in Moscow that will enable us to consolidate the objective of a final outcome in the Middle East peace process.

Mexico has participated actively in international efforts for peace, and we would join any initiative of this sort.

Meeting the objectives of the peace process should not remain wishful thinking. The critical situation for the people in the region as well as the constant tensions among actors who have been involved in this conflict for decades demands that progress be achieved as soon as possible.

A few days ago, we received new reports of serious incidents along the border between Gaza and Israel, which confirms the fact that tensions and insecurity continue to be present following the military operations that took place at the beginning of this year. We condemn these acts of violence, in particular the acts and attacks against the civilian population, and once again we urge all actors to respect the provisions of international humanitarian law at all times.

The living conditions in the Gaza Strip have continued to worsen due to the fact that humanitarian assistance has had difficulty gaining access and there have been ongoing restrictions on the provision of building materials, fuel and cash. According to figures provided by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), the goods entering Gaza in recent weeks totalled only one fifth of those for the corresponding period in 2007.

This situation is not acceptable. It contributes to the worsening of the humanitarian situation and a sense of frustration and injustice among the population, which helps to promote extremism and violence. The restrictions on Gaza lead to illicit trafficking in construction materials, fuel and food, and this in turn creates a vicious circle, opening the door for illicit trafficking in weapons and jeopardizing security throughout the region.

We therefore continue to insist on the need to establish an international monitoring mechanism that will guarantee a lasting ceasefire, the opening of border crossings and the monitoring of illicit trafficking in weapons, in accordance with resolution 1860 (2009). We support all initiatives aimed at establishing a mechanism of this type, the only way to ensure progressive normalization of the situation in the Gaza Strip.

This normalization also requires ongoing efforts aimed at achieving intra-Palestinian reconciliation, efforts which have received encouragement from the Government of Egypt. We regret the fact that the recent rounds of negotiations have not led to significant progress and we hope that the various factions will renew their commitment to reconciliation in order to promote the peace dialogue with Israel. We also urge Hamas and all Palestinian militia to renounce the use of violence in order to create a climate of trust that will be conducive to the peace process. Extremism should not be fought solely with weapons. We also need to provide, with due caution, a space for dialogue and negotiation.

Only through the establishment of a unified democratic Palestinian Government committed to the peace process, the Madrid principles and the Arab Peace Initiative will it be possible to set the foundation for a negotiating process that will lead to a lasting solution to the conflict.

The situation prevailing in East Jerusalem and in the West Bank continues to be a cause for concern. While we welcome the lifting of some restrictions on the movement of individuals in the West Bank, in particular in the Hawara outpost in the Nablus region, the population and the Palestinian economy continue to suffer from numerous restrictions imposed by the Israel Defense Forces.

The progressive professionalization of the Palestinian security forces in the West Bank shows that there is a commitment to peace and to regional stability. This commitment must be accompanied by concrete actions that will improve the living conditions of the Palestinian people. Only in this way can any serious progress be made towards peace.

Moreover, the commitments established under the road map on the policy of colonization and settlement, as well on the practice of the destruction of homes and expropriation in East Jerusalem, have yet to be fulfilled. Today, the press has reported that there are more than 300,000 Israeli settlers in the West Bank, and that population continues to increase significantly. This situation cannot continue. It is a negative element in the negotiating process between Israel and the Palestinian Authority and in the establishment of lasting peace. We recall that, in accordance with the principles of the road map and international law, all Israeli settlement practices in the occupied territories, including those that are qualified as natural growth, must be halted as soon as possible. The International Court of Justice

decision should be followed with regard to the building of the wall in occupied Palestinian territory, which runs counter to international law.

It is essential for efforts aimed at achieving regional peace to be pursued. A few weeks ago, we welcomed the peaceful and transparent holding of parliamentary elections in Lebanon on 7 June. The successful conclusion of this electoral process demonstrates the commitment of all Lebanese political actors to the Doha agreements and to the process of national reconciliation.

We also welcome the normalization of political and diplomatic relations between Lebanon and Syria, which will make it possible to enhance the dialogue between those two neighbouring countries in order to resolve pending issues and ultimately strengthen the sovereignty, territorial integrity and political independence of Lebanon in accordance with the relevant Security Council resolutions.

Despite these important achievements, we note with concern the events that took place a few days ago south of the Litani River in the zone of operations of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL), in particular an explosion in a weapons depot in the area of Khirbat Salim. The existence of weapons south of the Litani River that do not belong to the Lebanese Armed Forces is unacceptable and a violation of resolution 1701 (2006).

We urge the Government of Lebanon, in cooperation with UNIFIL, to take the necessary measures to ensure that these types of incidents do not recur. Similarly, we reiterate our appeal that Lebanon, Israel and all other parties involved in this conflict comply with the provisions of resolution 1701 (2006), in particular those referring to the arms embargo and the complete disarmament of all militias in Lebanon, with the sole objective of strengthening the sovereignty, territorial integrity and political independence of the country.

We attach particular importance to UNIFIL's ability to carry out its mandate unhindered and unrestricted in any way. We also reiterate our appeal to Israel and Syria to resume indirect talks under the auspices of Turkey, as such talks could be very beneficial to the population and security of both States.

The remaining challenges to resolving the conflict in the Middle East in a definitive manner are numerous. However, we trust that this is the right time to address those challenges progressively. The support of the international community is therefore essential but not sufficient. First and foremost, we need the resolve and commitment of the actors directly involved in the peace process. We therefore urge Israel and the Palestinian Authority to undertake a constructive dialogue without preconditions and on the basis of prior international obligations and agreements. Only in this way will we achieve the peace so hoped for by the people embroiled for 60 years in this conflict, which has had an impact not only on regional security but also, to a great extent, international stability and their future.

Mr. Vilović (Croatia): Allow me to begin by welcoming Assistant Secretary-General Oscar Fernandez-Taranco and thanking him for his candid briefing.

Our meeting today comes at the end of an intense transition period that has witnessed important political statements, meetings and events, bringing new opportunities and challenges.

My delegation aligns itself with the statement to be delivered later on behalf of the European Union, but allow me to add a few comments.

Croatia sees this meeting as representing hopeful momentum towards taking concrete steps to achieve a two-State solution and regional peace. We are encouraged by the vigorous engagement of the United States Administration, which has created the impetus for arriving at a lasting solution in the Middle East, including through the personal determination of President Obama and today's activities of the special envoy, Senator Mitchell. We also welcome the commitment of Prime Minister Netanyahu and President Abbas to the two-State solution. Croatia believes that our collective interest is to remain focused on a shared, clear and fundamental objective — the establishment of an independent, democratic and viable Palestinian State living side by side in peace and security with Israel, and a just, lasting and comprehensive peace in the region.

For the international community, this means focusing on creating conditions conducive to the peace process and encouraging the parties to resume negotiations as soon as possible, with a view to settling all permanent status issues on the basis of the two-State solution, mutual recognition, freedom from violence,

incitement and terror, and respect for previous agreements and understandings. There is no other way for the two parties to realize their legitimate aspirations.

This means respecting the integrity of the bilateral negotiations while also recognizing the regional dimension of the process. We value the efforts of the responsible regional partners to secure a just, lasting and comprehensive peace in the Middle East based on the Arab Peace Initiative.

Croatia understands that the political and diplomatic process remains inextricably linked to the situation on the ground. We understand that it may be illusory to expect credible progress without positively changing the realities on the ground, or without properly addressing the obstacles. That is why it is crucial for both parties to implement their obligations under the Road Map and to refrain from provocative acts or unilateral actions that could prejudge the outcome of the negotiations or erode trust and confidence in the peace process. This makes it necessary to end settlement activities, dismantle all outposts and refrain from any unilateral action.

Division among the Palestinians and their inadequate institutional and security capacity, as well as the regional environment, are causes for concern. Croatia appreciates the mediation efforts of Egypt and the Arab League in overcoming Palestinian divisions.

Another ongoing cause for concern is the humanitarian situation in Gaza. Croatia continues to believe that this crisis ultimately requires a political solution. The controlled and sustained opening of border crossings, matched with appropriate monitoring arrangements, is essential for securing adequate supplies of food, medicine and cash, as well as reconstruction and economic recovery. In that context, the full implementation of resolution 1860 (2009) is critical to obtaining a durable solution to the Gaza crisis and responding to legitimate Israeli security concerns. Sustained and indiscriminate rocket attacks on southern Israel and the ongoing arms smuggling cannot be tolerated.

Croatia understands that the renewed push for peace demands that both parties take decisive steps. The Palestinian Authority needs to continue its efforts to consolidate progress in developing an effective and reformed security sector and functioning institutions. Israel must be reassured that Palestinian statehood will not come at the expense of its legitimate security concerns. Both parties must take credible steps to overcome the disruptive effects of the crisis in confidence and implement their obligations under the Road Map.

There also needs to be improvement in the lives of ordinary Palestinians throughout the West Bank and Gaza, including by promoting Palestinian economic development based on the full implementation of the Agreement on Movement and Access. We are pleased to note the recent trend of economic and security revival in the West Bank, and welcome steps taken by Israel towards removing some of the road blocks in the West Bank. Israel and Arab countries in turn would need to undertake confidence-building measures. We share the view that the comprehensive peace process needs to see progress both on the Israeli-Palestinian and on the Syrian-Lebanese tracks, including by preparing the Moscow conference.

Allow me to briefly turn to Lebanon. Croatia congratulates the people of Lebanon on holding free, fair and peaceful elections — a remarkable demonstration of their yearning for democracy and normalcy. With the process of the formation of a Government under way, which we hope will continue in a spirit of dialogue and responsibility, it remains crucial, as the recent incident in South Lebanon clearly demonstrated, for all political actors to remain committed to the full implementation of the relevant Security Council resolutions and the Taif Accords and to address the question of disarming Hizbullah, which remains of central importance to peace and stability in Lebanon and the region.

Mr. Mayr-Harting (Austria): I too would like to thank Assistant Secretary-General Oscar Fernandez-Taranco for his update on recent developments in the Middle East. We welcome the presence at the table of the Permanent Representative of Israel and the Permanent Observer of Palestine.

Austria aligns itself with the statement to be delivered by the representative of Sweden on behalf of the European Union, but let me add the following points.

We welcome the recent intensified efforts by the international community to break the deadlock in the Middle East peace process. As suggested by Mr. Javier Solana, High Representative for the Common Foreign and Security Policy of the European Union, the

Security Council can assume a key role with its steadfast support for the peace process and its final objective, namely, a permanent two-State solution.

We would like to recall the European Council conclusions of June and point out that, beyond its continued political and economic support to the peace process, the European Union is ready to contribute substantially to post-conflict arrangements aimed at ensuring the sustainability of peace agreements, while also addressing regional, economic and security dimensions.

We welcome the determination of the Quartet, as expressed at its recent meeting, to seek a comprehensive resolution of the Arab-Israeli conflict. The Arab Peace Initiative and the decision of the Arab League of 24 June, underscoring the commitment to comprehensive peace on all tracks, are also important contributions to the Middle East Peace process.

We welcome the talks under way between the United States and all parties in the region aimed at creating conditions for the prompt resumption and early conclusion of negotiations without preconditions on all permanent status issues.

That Prime Minister Netanyahu has expressed a commitment to a peace agreement that includes the establishment of a Palestinian State is a welcome initial move. But that needs to be followed up by concrete steps, such as a revision of Israeli settlement policies, with an immediate end to settlement activities, including in East Jerusalem and including natural growth and the dismantlement of all outposts erected since March 2001. Furthermore, we call upon the Government of Israel to refrain from unilateral actions in East Jerusalem, including the demolition of houses and evictions.

While we acknowledge the progress made by the Palestinian Authority in security sector reform, efforts to fight violent extremism and to strengthen the rule of law need to be stepped up. That includes reliable long-term safeguards against renewed rocket attacks from the Gaza Strip.

Palestinian reconciliation is vital. More decisive efforts towards a unified political leadership by all political representatives of the Palestinians and a common renouncement of violence are required. The delay of the Cairo talks, already in their seventh round, is therefore a source of concern. We hope that Palestinian leaders will work towards the prevention of even deeper separation between the West Bank and Gaza, thereby preserving chances for the unity of the future Palestinian State.

Half a year after the escalation of the Gaza conflict, we again reiterate the importance of the full implementation of resolution 1860 (2009). Ensuring open access to the Gaza Strip is indispensable for improving the intolerable humanitarian situation of the people in Gaza and for the start of reconstruction efforts.

Controlled but comprehensive supply of the Gaza Strip would discourage tunnel trafficking and allow for effective measures against the smuggling of weapons through the tunnels, thereby also contributing to the security of Israel. Austria continues to hold the view that rebuilding Gaza also requires rebuilding trust and respect for the rule of law. That includes a thorough investigation of all allegations of violations of international humanitarian and human rights law and a follow-up to the findings of such investigations.

Concerning the situation in the West Bank, we strongly encourage the continued and sustained easing of restrictions on movement. As Prime Minister Netanyahu has stressed, a strong Palestinian economy will strengthen peace. We therefore hope that that objective will be supported by a rapid and ambitious programme of removal of barriers to freedom of movement and economic activity in the West Bank.

Regarding Lebanon, we are very concerned about ongoing developments in southern Lebanon. That is an issue that we brought up in the Council earlier on. It is clear that the most recent events constitute a violation of resolution 1701 (2006). The explosion of an arms cache and the incidents that followed have once more revealed the general fragility of the situation. Thus, we reiterate the need for the full implementation of resolution 1701 (2006) by all sides. We encourage all sides to engage in visible steps in that regard.

Austria congratulates Lebanon on the successful holding of parliamentary elections. We hope that the process of the formation of a new Government under Prime Minister-designate Saad Hariri will see steady progress. We wish to stress the importance of close cooperation by any new Government with the main constitutional bodies as an important step towards further consolidating Lebanon's democracy.

In conclusion, let me express once again Austria's conviction that it is essential to make progress on all tracks of the Middle East peace process. Only a comprehensive peace will be a durable peace.

Mr. Wolff (United States of America): Let me also thank the Secretary-General for his report, as well as Assistant Secretary-General Fernandez-Taranco for his briefing. We welcome him to his new position and congratulate him on his first appearance before the Council.

The United States is firmly committed to working towards a comprehensive and lasting peace in the Middle East, including a two-State solution, with Israel and Palestine living side by side in peace and security. President Obama is personally engaged in that effort, and he will continue to lead it.

In consultation with States in the region and beyond, the United States is working vigorously to create the conditions for the prompt resumption and early conclusion of negotiations to end the Israeli-Palestinian and Arab-Israeli conflicts. My Government's Special Envoy, Senator George Mitchell, is again in the region today, consulting with his counterparts about the way forward. As Special Envoy Mitchell emphasized yesterday, comprehensive peace is the only way to guarantee stability, security and prosperity for all States in the region. We will need Arabs and Israelis alike to work with us to succeed.

As we move forward, we should recall that all parties have responsibilities. With Israel and the Palestinians, those responsibilities centre on fulfilling the Road Map commitments. With Israel, our focus is on settlements, outposts and movement in the West Bank. With the Palestinians, our focus includes their commitment to provide effective security in areas under their control, to continue important security and other reforms and to end incitement. With the Arab States, we are seeking increased support for the Palestinian Authority and forward movement on their offer to normalize relations with Israel, made in the 2002 Arab Peace Initiative. As a concrete gesture, we urge the leaders of Arab States to do their part by taking meaningful steps towards normalization.

We have been working intensively with the Israeli Government to deal with the issue of settlement activity. For decades, United States Administrations have had a consistent position on that subject. While we recognize that those decisions are difficult, we are asking Israel to uphold commitments it has made, including to stop settlements and to dismantle outposts.

At the same time, Israel is taking positive steps to ease the living conditions of Palestinians and to create circumstances that can help lead to the establishment of a viable Palestinian State. Over the past several months, Israel has removed, or eased conditions at, several key checkpoints in the West Bank. The Israeli military has also withdrawn its troops to the outskirts of four cities. If expanded and sustained, these changes should have a significant impact on Palestinian freedom of movement, economic development and growth and overall quality of life. We expect that this process will continue.

These positive developments make it all the more imperative that we work together to support the Palestinian Authority and its non-partisan, transparent programmes that aim to improve the lives of ordinary Palestinians throughout the West Bank and Gaza. The World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) have endorsed the Palestinian Authority's 2009 budget and the accounting controls it has put in place.

But the Palestinian Authority's domestic revenue is still not enough to cover all its operational expenses and to continue security and institutional reforms. According to IMF projections for 2009, the Palestinian Authority needs $120 million each month in donor assistance to cover its operational expenses. Yet donor support has failed to keep up with the Palestinian Authority's needs, falling almost $50 million short on an average monthly basis during the first quarter of the year. Thus, the Palestinian Authority is accumulating arrears and unsustainable levels of debt to private banks, threatening its financial stability.

On 24 July, Secretary of State Clinton announced the transfer of $200 million in direct budget support from the United States to the Palestinian Authority. We call on other countries that wish to see a strong, viable Palestinian State to join us in providing such concrete support to the Palestinian Authority.

On the security front, the Palestinian Authority is taking its responsibilities for security sector reform seriously. To date, 1,998 Palestinian security personnel have completed training in Jordan and have been deployed to the West Bank. Another full battalion of roughly 500 men will begin training in August. These efforts must continue in conjunction with the invigorated efforts to promote the rule of law, so that

Palestinians can live in the secure environment they have long deserved and so that they can demonstrate that Palestine will be a responsible State in the region.

The unimpeded distribution throughout Gaza of humanitarian assistance, including food, fuel and medical treatment, remains a pressing issue. As Secretary Clinton has said, progress towards the goals we seek is more likely to grow out of opportunity than out of futility, out of hope than out of misery. By ensuring the delivery and distribution of humanitarian assistance to Gaza, we aim to foster the conditions in which a Palestinian State can be fully realized: a State that is a responsible partner, a State at peace with Israel and with its Arab neighbours, a State accountable to its people, a State that Palestinians everywhere can be proud of, a State that is respected around the world. The United States continues to urge the Government of Israel to ensure that United Nations and other humanitarian agencies are able to go about their work.

Moreover, all United Nations Member States, including those in the region, must work to ensure the end of illicit smuggling of arms and ammunition into Gaza, lest Hamas restock its arsenal and spark further conflict. My Government therefore supports reopening Gaza's border crossings in a controlled manner, with an appropriate monitoring regime involving international and Palestinian Authority participation.

Arab States also have responsibilities, in particular to support the legitimate Palestinian Authority and help President Abbas and Prime Minister Fayyad, thus demonstrating that negotiations, not the terrorism and violence chosen by Hamas, are the path to an independent and viable State.

President Obama has also called for Arab States to take clear and unambiguous steps towards normalization with Israel in the context of significant Israeli actions, in order to advance our shared goal of comprehensive peace in the Middle East and stability for all the region's people. The Arab Peace Initiative, supported by the 57 members of the Organization of the Islamic Conference, was a positive step, but more is needed. Those who embraced the proposal should taken meaningful steps now, and that includes contributing to a more positive international backdrop to our efforts for peace in international forums, including here at the United Nations. We will be looking for early signs of such a change.

The Quartet remains the most effective instrument for marshalling the international community's diplomatic efforts in support of Middle East peace. In Trieste last month, the Quartet underscored that the only viable solution to the conflict is one that fulfils the aspirations of both parties for independent homelands: two States for two peoples living side by side in peace and security. It also welcomed Prime Minister Netanyahu's and President Abbas's commitment to the two-State solution. The Quartet voiced its support for Palestinian unity in pursuit of such a solution. It called on all Palestinians to commit themselves to non-violence, recognition of Israel and acceptance of previous agreements, as well as to the obligation to facilitate the reconstruction of Gaza and the organization of elections.

I should note here that since the most recent Security Council consultation on the Middle East we have marked the third year that Gilad Shalit has been held in captivity by Hamas, in direct contradiction of international law. To compound that grave violation, Hamas has never allowed the International Committee of the Red Cross access to Corporal Shalit. We encourage all efforts to secure Gilad Shalit's immediate release.

Events in Lebanon over the past several weeks have underscored the importance of full implementation of Security Council resolutions 1559 (2004) and 1701 (2006). Implementing those resolutions is the only sure path to protecting Lebanon's sovereignty, stability and independence. As the Council heard last week, on 14 July a series of explosions shook a house in the village of Khirbat Salim, well south of the Litani river. Initial findings point to a large quantity of arms and ammunition being stored there in serious violation of resolution 1701 (2006), with all evidence pointing to Hizbullah. The Khirbat Salim events clearly demonstrate the urgent need to bring arms in Lebanon under legitimate control of the State and the need for the international community to remain fully committed to supporting the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) in its mission.

We are deeply concerned about the threat that such weapons pose to the civilian populations in both Israel and Lebanon. By Hizbullah's own admission, it is continuing to rearm. That is a dangerous development which represents a severe violation of a core objective of resolution 1701 (2006), since it was

Hizbullah that launched the 2006 war that neither Israel nor Lebanon sought.

We join the Secretary-General in calling on Hizbullah to disarm and to transform itself into a solely political party. We also call for UNIFIL and the Lebanese Government to act energetically to follow up on information about Hizbullah's weapons stocks and call for full and unimpeded investigation into the explosion of the weapons cache at Khirbat Salim.

Resolving that situation would reassure the Government of Israel that its northern border and citizens are secure. Israel has said that, until it has such assurances, it will persist with its reconnaissance overflights of Lebanon. While we recognize those overflights also as violations of the Blue Line, we understand Israel's justification for them. Simply put, we have not succeeded in ensuring that Lebanon has secured its borders in order to prevent the entry of illegal arms or related materiel. In short, Hizbullah has intentionally perpetuated the threats that lead to these Blue Line violations.

The United States remains firmly committed to supporting UNIFIL and the Lebanese Armed Forces in their efforts to fully implement the provisions of resolution 1701 (2006). We stand firmly in support of Lebanon's State institutions, and that includes providing the Lebanese Armed Forces with support to protect Lebanon and its citizens, pursue international peace and security and implement the resolutions of the Security Council.

Mr. Lacroix (France) (*spoke in French*): At the outset, I wish to thank Mr. Oscar Fernandez-Taranco, Assistant Secretary-General for Political Affairs, for his briefing and to welcome him to the Security Council.

Naturally, France endorses the statement to be made by the Permanent Representative of Sweden on behalf of the European Union.

To begin, I would like briefly to refer to the Lebanese dossier before the Security Council. France welcomes the success of the legislative elections held in Lebanon on 7 June, which represents a new, positive step for that country and its democracy. We hope that the renewed dialogue will be continued and help Lebanon to pursue the unity, stability and reform sought by its people.

Recent incidents in southern Lebanon remind us of the importance of the full implementation by all parties of resolution 1701 (2006). We reiterate our full support for the work of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL). Any attack on UNIFIL is unacceptable, and it is important and even essential that the parties cooperate fully with the Force.

I turn now to the Israeli-Palestinian issue. Rarely if ever has there been such international consensus on the nature of a solution to the conflict — the establishment of a viable, independent and democratic Palestinian State living side by side with Israel within secure and recognized borders. The statements of the Israeli Prime Minister on that specific point represent a first and welcome step, as the ministers for foreign affairs of the European Union stressed on 15 June.

The task now is to determine how successfully to engage the various stages leading to that objective. Those stages are many, difficult to complete and varied. I shall refer to the three principal stages.

First, daily living conditions must be improved so that the people do not lose all hope. That will require the implementation by the parties of their Road Map obligations. In that respect, the Israeli authorities must cease all settlement activity, the destruction of homes and other evictions in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem. The issue of settlements is, of course, critical, and we welcome the stress placed by President Obama on that point. As President Sarkozy has recalled, by complicating the prospects for establishing a Palestinian State, settlement activity does not contribute to Israel's security but will, contrarily, only increase the dangers. The authorities of France and the European Union have sent that very clear message to the Israeli authorities.

The second requisite development on the ground involves freedom of movement and access. That applies not only to Gaza, on which I will have more to say, but also to the West Bank and East Jerusalem. The lifting by the Israeli authorities of some major obstacles to movement, in particular in Nablus, is an important move that must be followed up.

All measures aimed at restoring a normal life for the Palestinian people must be encouraged. Beyond their humanitarian and human consequences, such measures will also help the Palestinians and their authorities to meet their responsibility to strengthen the foundations of their future State. In that regard, the Palestinian Authority must pursue its efforts to strengthen the security sector and ensure the rule of

law. The pitiless fight against terrorism must also be an ongoing priority.

With regard to the situation in Gaza, the consolidation of the ceasefire, encompassing the full implementation of resolution 1860 (2009), remains a priority. Resolution 1860 (2009) defined the main parameters of a permanent ceasefire, including the opening of crossings and the establishment of mechanisms to end the smuggling of weapons.

The humanitarian situation in Gaza is most disturbing. We call for the immediate opening of checkpoints, in particular to facilitate access for humanitarian assistance and the resumption of economic activity. Beyond the issues of humanitarian assistance and reconstruction, we believe that such closures will perpetuate the political status quo in Gaza. In addition to those efforts, we continue firmly to call for the unconditional and immediate release of Gilad Shalit.

My third and final point involves inter-Palestinian reconciliation and the role of neighbouring States. The Palestinians must speak in a single voice if the peace process is to resume. There can be no peace agreement with a single party representing the Palestinian people, or a viable Palestinian State without Gaza. While talks to achieve inter-Palestinian reconciliation face myriad challenges, we continue to support the Egyptian mediation efforts. Of course, the countries of the region have an important role to play. At the appropriate time, we will be prepared to work with a Government of national unity that respects the basic principles of the peace process and agrees to resume negotiations with Israel leading to a two-State solution.

Moreover, we continue to lend our full support to the Arab Peace Initiative, which must be part of a comprehensive and lasting solution in the Middle East. Any step taken or gesture made by States of the region to demonstrate their commitment to lasting peace, which necessarily involves good-neighbourly relations with Israel, is to be encouraged. In the context of the regional approach, we also believe that the time has come to move forward on the Syrian and Lebanese tracks of the peace process.

The elements to which I have referred will, at this critical juncture for the Middle East, determine progress towards the necessary resumption of negotiations on a peace agreement on the basis of the principle of land for peace, the resolutions of the Security Council and the Arab Peace Initiative. The international community and the Security Council must be fully committed, because the situation in the Middle East is of urgent concern to us all. France and the European Union have repeatedly shown our readiness to assist in facilitating negotiations to the maximum possible extent and to consider guarantees for a possible new agreement. We note with great hope the intentions expressed by the new United States Administration. We must now move tangibly towards peace, and France is resolved to play its full role to that end.

Mr. Koudougou (Burkina Faso) (*spoke in French*): At the outset, my delegation wishes to thank you, Sir, for organizing today's debate on the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question, a subject to which we attach great importance.

We also thank Mr. Fernandez-Taranco, Assistant Secretary-General for Political Affairs, for his introductory briefing to our discussion, which we hope will contribute to the search for a comprehensive, just and lasting solution for the entire Middle East.

The evolution of the situation in the Middle East, particularly with respect to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, remains of major concern to the international community, which has undertaken numerous efforts and initiatives to re-establish lasting peace in a region beset by several decades of war that have claimed countless victims. My delegation once again welcomes the efforts made at various levels by the Quartet and a number of countries and organizations to help the parties to relaunch their peace talks, particularly now that recent developments threaten to compromise the fragile progress that has been achieved. These developments include the ongoing Jewish settlement activity in the West Bank and the appalling humanitarian situation that continues to prevail in the Gaza Strip due to the lengthy closure of crossing points, which has hindered the delivery of essential goods and particularly the importation of construction materials into Gaza. All such actions contribute to hindering the momentum of the dialogue resumed at the Annapolis Conference.

At this point, we believe it critical for the parties to commit further, resolutely and unconditionally to open and direct discussions on all issues. In this regard, Burkina Faso welcomes the recent commitments made

by the Israeli authorities to launch discussions with a view to achieving peace with the Palestinians and to expand this peace to the regional level.

Likewise, we welcome the public statement made by the Palestinians which states that the Palestinians are ready to resume discussions immediately.

The urgency of the situation calls for direct talks to resume without delay and without conditions. These discussions should respect the spirit and the letter of relevant Security Council resolutions, in particular, the most recent, 1850 (2008) and 1860 (2009), as well as the Madrid terms of reference and the Arab Peace Initiative of 2002. These undoubtedly constitute the most appropriate political and legal frameworks for a comprehensive, just and lasting settlement to the conflict in the Middle East in general.

My delegation believes in the advent of a stable, peaceful and prosperous Middle East, with the full participation of an independent and viable Palestinian State, with secure and internationally recognized borders, living side by side in peace with the State of Israel, which, itself, would live in security with all its neighbours.

In our view, this is the only solution for putting an end to this regional conflict. To achieve this, the first step to take, as we emphasized during the most recent ministerial debate, held in May under the Russian presidency, is still the establishment of a genuine climate of confidence through the adoption of the following measures: an end to extremist rhetoric from all sides; an end to Israel's construction of the separation wall; an end to its policies of colonization and settlements; the guarantee of humanitarian access by opening passage points; and an end to the firing of rockets by Hamas and all its other forms of violence in Israeli territory.

In parallel, the Palestinians should succeed in restoring their unity to give themselves a chance to build a stable and prosperous State. We reiterate our thanks to Egypt for its commitment and efforts to help them do so, and we encourage the international community to continue to provide support to this end.

The donor conference held in Sharm El-Sheikh on 2 March of this year was an opportunity to make commitments on essential issues. We hope that these commitments will be kept.

In my delegation's view, humanitarian aid must be able, without hindrance, to reach Gaza and all the occupied Palestinian territories, including East Jerusalem, in order to ease the suffering of the population.

It is evident, then, that the road to peace in the Middle East is indeed still long, but there are grounds for hope given such positive signs as the reestablishment of diplomatic relations between Lebanon and Syria. This good example indicates that, with further efforts, we can ultimately succeed in defining the conditions for peaceful coexistence between Israel and its Arab neighbours in the light of the aspirations for peace and security on all sides.

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict, on which the stability of the entire region seems to depend, requires ongoing attention and unflagging support from the Security Council so as to ensure compliance with all related resolutions it has adopted.

In conclusion, we would like once again to reaffirm that a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in the Middle East cannot be contemplated without the commitment and determination of all actors in the conflict. They should shoulder their responsibilities, reaffirm their commitment, show their firm determination and take ownership of the processes leading to peace.

Mr. Urbina (Costa Rica) (*spoke in Spanish*): Let me begin by thanking you, Mr. President, and your delegation for convening this debate. We would also like to welcome Mr. Fernandez-Taranco and thank him for the report he has given us. We welcome the presence here today of the distinguished representatives of Israel and Palestine.

This debate is a timely and necessary one. The quantity and quality of efforts today seem to show the conviction of the international community that the time has come for the conflict in the Middle East, a source of instability and violence, to be put to rest once and for all.

Despite the temporary suspension of negotiations, perhaps never before have there been so many initiatives, never before have we been so close to making reality the aspirations of two communities in neighbouring countries to live as two States, side by side, in peace and security.

However, the remaining tasks are not easy ones. There are a number of situations which will require renewed determination by all parties in the region and by those who have interest or influence in that region. In this context, we agree on the need to conclude prompt peace agreements between Israel and Lebanon and Israel and Syria. The Arab Peace Initiative is a key platform for the normalization of relations among all States in the region. We hope that in the future it will be possible to extend respect and coexistence beyond this very reduced environment in which we must work today.

Costa Rica also knows that the unity of the Palestinian people is an absolutely essential ingredient for the progress of any peace initiative between Israelis and Palestinians. We recognize the valuable mediation efforts of Egypt and the Arab League, and we call upon the Palestinian people to place their trust in peaceful means, to recognize the State of Israel and to comply with earlier agreements and commitments.

We also hope that once the natural shocks which a change of regime produces have been overcome the authorities of Israel and Palestine will return to negotiate on key remaining issues in the conflict, without preconditions and with the understanding that these negotiations will be carried out on the basis of obligations already undertaken and agreements previously reached between the parties which are underpinned by international law and the decisions of this Council.

In this context, Costa Rica supports the appeal of the Quartet to the parties to comply with their obligations in accordance with the Road Map, and we share their belief that unilateral action will not prejudge the result of the negotiations and will not be recognized by the international community. We believe, therefore, that it is absolutely essential for Israel to halt its policies of settlements and their expansion, regardless of what it chooses to call it. Every new wall built is a new obstacle to peace.

Particularly in this area, Israel must not ignore international law or the consensus which exists on this issue in the international community. This persistent illegal behaviour on Israel's part is one of the reasons — although not the only one — why its other concerns are not being considered with the calm necessary for their resolution. Likewise, we urge the Government of Israel to contain the violence of some of its settlers against Palestinians.

Costa Rica has always understood the legitimate security concerns of Israel. However, we believe that they do not justify the disproportionate restrictions it imposes on the Palestinian people, affecting their human rights and creating an unparalleled humanitarian situation. The humanitarian situation in Gaza is dramatic and unsustainable as a result of the restriction of flows of humanitarian and commercial goods on which some 1.5 million people depend. It must change. Access must be allowed for materials to rebuild the homes, hospitals, schools and medical infrastructure destroyed at the beginning of this year. We reiterate our call for international law, in particular international humanitarian law, to be respected and for border crossing activity to be normalized.

Costa Rica welcomes the measures that the Israeli Government has taken to ease restrictions on movement in the West Bank and hopes for new conciliatory gestures on its part. Similarly, we acknowledge the reforms adopted by the Palestinian Authority to improve its security sector, and we see Israeli cooperation as a step in the right direction towards the establishment of robust Palestinian institutions that one day will be part of its State apparatus.

I conclude by acknowledging the work of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East for the courage with which it continues to provide assistance to those affected by the conflict, despite the difficult conditions in which it works.

Mr. Quarrey (United Kingdom): Like others, we are grateful to Mr. Fernandez-Taranco for his briefing to the Security Council this morning. Indeed, we welcome him to the Council for the first time.

In the Council's regular meetings on this issue in recent months, there has been broad agreement on what needs to be done to achieve the ultimate goal of a two-State solution with an independent, democratic, contiguous and viable Palestinian State, based on 1967 borders, living side by side in peace and security with Israel. However, the peace negotiations essential to achieving that aim still elude us. The parties must take bold action to create an atmosphere conducive to peace.

We fully support last week's statement by the Secretary-General calling for a freeze on Israeli settlement activity in the occupied Palestinian territories. Such settlements are illegal under international law. Their continued expansion, including so-called natural growth, goes against the overwhelming international consensus and, indeed, the decisions of the Security Council. It creates a further obstacle to the two-State solution, which is the only sustainable response to the national aspirations of both parties.

We are especially concerned by Prime Minister Netanyahu's recent comments, rejecting calls to halt work on the Shepherd's Hotel settlement project in East Jerusalem. Developments such as that, in what is by any measure an Arab neighbourhood, would seriously undermine the prospects for a successful two-State solution, with Jerusalem as the capital of both Israel and Palestine. We urge the Israeli Government to bring an immediate halt to that construction and to cease activities such as the house demolitions and evictions that continue to cause such deep resentment.

We also encourage Arab partners to demonstrate their readiness to move towards a normalization of relations with Israel, as envisaged in the Arab Peace Initiative. Prime Minister Netanyahu's remarks on 23 July indicated Israeli's interest in expanding peace with the Palestinians into a broader regional peace. We welcome the views expressed recently by His Highness the Crown Prince of Bahrain on taking forward the Arab Peace Initiative. It is vital that all Arab States demonstrate both their commitment to dialogue and peaceful relations and their willingness to respond positively to any significant Israeli action to freeze settlement activity.

Firm commitments are also needed from the Palestinians. Rocket and mortar attacks by Palestinian militants continue. The people of southern Israel have the right to live free from terror. We call for those attacks to stop, for the immediate release of Gilad Shalit, for access by the International Committee of the Red Cross to Corporal Shalit and for an end to all acts of violence. Palestinian factions should unite behind President Abbas, and we support the efforts of Egypt in that regard. Palestinian reconciliation is essential to prevent further political separation of the West Bank and Gaza.

We are encouraged by the recent increase in economic activity in the West Bank. We support the work of Quartet Representative Tony Blair and his team in helping to create the conditions for such activity. In particular, there have been positive developments in the city of Nablus, where the removal of just six Israeli roadblocks and checkpoints has led to a marked improvement to local economic activity. We welcome recent Israeli action to reduce movement and access restrictions and encourage further such steps. The benefits are plain to see.

That is all in sharp contrast to the humanitarian situation in Gaza. We are still a long way from the full implementation of resolution 1860 (2009). Continued Israeli restrictions imposed on the Gaza crossings have allowed for little improvement in the plight of ordinary Gazans. Restrictions on certain foodstuffs and reconstruction materials have a serious and detrimental impact, forcing goods to be smuggled in through tunnels. As those tunnels are under Hamas control, the restrictions serve only to strengthen their position. It is in the interest of all that those restrictions be eased, particularly as winter approaches.

We remain deeply concerned by allegations that breaches of international humanitarian law were committed by both sides during the Gaza conflict earlier this year. We encourage all parties involved to cooperate fully with the Human Rights Council fact-finding mission, headed by Justice Goldstone.

As I said at the start, much-needed peace talks still elude us. With regard to Syria, Lebanon and Israel, negotiations are the only way to resolve the issues that divide them. Now is the time to take that forward. We urge Syria and Israel to restart indirect peace talks and to consider moving to direct talks.

The positive manner in which the Lebanese elections took place provides a good basis on which to make real progress towards creating a durable peace. Recent events in south Lebanon, particularly the explosion of an arms cache on 14 July, underline, however, the urgency of moving towards a comprehensive agreement. We are deeply concerned that Hizbullah continues to maintain a substantial military capacity, which is a destabilizing factor for the whole region. We condemn the recent attacks on peacekeepers of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon in the strongest possible terms. We urge all parties to step up their commitment to full and unconditional implementation of resolution 1701

(2006). Movement on Ghajar would be an important confidence-building measure.

Mr. Churkin (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): First of all, I would like to thank Mr. Fernandez-Taranco for his briefing on the situation in the Middle East and to welcome him to the Security Council.

Since the Security Council's previous discussions on the Middle East, the situation in the region has remained at the centre of the international community's attention. With the 11 May ministerial-level meeting of the Council (see S/PV.6123), the Trieste meeting of the Quartet of Middle East mediators and the Group of Eight (G-8) summit in L'Aquila, the international legal basis for the peace process has been reaffirmed, primarily the relevant United Nations resolutions, the Madrid principles and the Road Map. The significance of the Arab Peace Initiative has been noted. The importance of the two-State principle has been voiced.

All those key provisions were also reflected in a statement made by the President of the Russian Federation, Dmitry Medvedev, at the headquarters of the League of Arab States. A positive development that should be noted is the readiness expressed by the Prime Minister of Israel, Benjamin Netanyahu, for an immediate resumption of negotiations with the Palestinian side and his de facto recognition of the two-State concept.

I emphasize that the main objective now is to create conditions for an immediate resumption of negotiations and strict compliance by the parties with their obligations under the Road Map, including to combat terrorist activity and to ensure freedom of movement for the population in the West Bank.

One of the main factors hampering the resumption of dialogue is settlement activity, including natural growth. We consider unacceptable actions that bring about new realities on the ground and could prejudge the outcome of final-status negotiations. The ongoing blockade of Gaza, which is causing the suffering of civilians in the Gaza Strip, is also unacceptable. Moving the peace process forward requires restoring unity in the Palestinian ranks, based on well-known principles.

Once again, we would like to commend most highly the mediation efforts of Egypt. We look forward to results in moving intra-Palestinian consultations forward. Unfortunately, the most recent round has once again been postponed — this time to 25 August.

With regard to achieving a comprehensive settlement in the region, another relevant factor is the return to active diplomacy on the Syrian and Lebanese tracks of the peace process. It is now important, through collective efforts, actively to help eliminate obstacles to restoring a full-fledged regional peace process. Russia's initiative to hold an international conference on the Middle East in Moscow this year, which has wide support, aims to promote that goal. We continue to prepare for the forum, which is enshrined in the Security Council resolutions, the decisions of the Middle East Quartet and the recent G-8 summit.

That topic was discussed during the latest trip to the region by the Special Representative to the Middle East of the President of Russia, Alexander Saltanov, who held extensive talks in the region. We firmly intend to continue our work at various levels with all interested parties and partners. The Moscow meeting should be effective and productive.

I would now like to say a few words on Lebanon. Russia continues to hold the position of unwavering support for the sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity of the Lebanese State. We welcome the successful holding of parliamentary elections. We are closely following talks under way in Beirut among the leading political parties of the country, and hope they will soon conclude and that an effective Government will be formed to represent the interests of all communities living in Lebanon.

We are concerned by outbreaks of tension in southern Lebanon and welcome efforts now being made by Lebanese authorities in cooperation with the United Nations, to defuse the tension. We reaffirm the need for strict compliance with the provisions of resolution 1701 (2006) by all sides without exception. That is the only way to guarantee the maintenance of stability in southern Lebanon.

Mr. Liu Zhenmin (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): First of all, I would like to thank you, Sir, for convening this open meeting and Assistant Secretary-General Fernandez-Taranco for his briefing on the situation in the Middle East.

Over the past six months, the Middle East peace process has had its ups and downs. Early in the year, the conflict in Gaza claimed the lives of hundreds of

civilians and caused serious loss of property, making the original situation more tense and fragile. The Council adopted resolution 1860 (2009) which led to an end to hostilities between Israel and Palestine and created conditions for relaunching the peace process. However, it is disturbing that the resolution has not been fully and effectively implemented. The humanitarian situation in Gaza remains serious and reconstruction has been slow.

China calls upon all parties concerned to fully and conscientiously implement resolution 1860 (2009) and to avoid taking any action that could reignite tension. China calls on Israel to open all the crossing points into Gaza and to ensure that reconstruction can proceed smoothly. The international community should honour its pledges as soon as possible in order to help the people of Gaza normalize their lives.

The situation in the other occupied Palestinian territories is also a source of concern. The situation of the Palestinian people in the West Bank remains tense and they cannot enjoy a life of dignity. China expresses its deep concern and urges Israel to respond conscientiously to the appeal of the international community to halt construction of the separation wall and the settlements.

In the current situation, political negotiation remains the only viable path towards the achievement of lasting peace in the Middle East. China believes that irreversible peace can be achieved only through a negotiated agreement by all parties. We hope that all parties will commit themselves to dialogue with the goal of achieving the comprehensive, just and lasting peace in the Middle East that it is in their own interest and in the interest of regional peace and stability in the Middle East. We call on all parties to avoid any action that could exacerbate tensions in the Middle East.

Reconciliation between Palestinians is essential to safeguarding the interests of the Palestinian people and to ensuring the resumption of the Middle East peace process. China appreciates Egypt's efforts to that end and hopes that the Palestinian parties will set store by their long-term national interests, resolve their differences through dialogue, achieve reconciliation and establish a Government of national unity.

Resolving the issue of Israel and Palestine is the only way to achieve the peaceful coexistence of the two States of Palestine and Israel. China supports the implementation of the two-State solution based on the relevant Security Council resolutions, the Arab Peace Initiative and the principle of land for peace. That will require not only the efforts of the parties concerned, but also the help and support of the international community. All parties must try their best to encourage Palestine and Israel to address their challenges positively and to persevere in their efforts to achieve the objective of the two States of Palestine and Israel with the Arab people and Jewish people living in peace.

Other issues in the Middle East are also important components of the Middle East peace process. China is pleased to see that the political and security situation in Lebanon has improved somewhat and that legislative elections have been carried out. China hopes that Lebanon can form a new Government as soon as possible. We respect the independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity of Lebanon and express our concern about the multiple security incidents that have taken place recently in southern Lebanon. We call on all parties concerned to fully implement resolution 1701 (2006) and encourage them to create conditions for the resumption of negotiations between Syria and Israel.

China has always been committed to the promotion of the Middle East peace process and welcomes all initiatives conducive to that end. We support Russia's initiatives to convene an international conference on the Middle East in Moscow within the year. China encourages the Quartet and the Arab countries to play an important role in persuading the parties concerned to resume serious and direct negotiations as soon as possible.

It is China's hope that the Security Council will address the question of the Middle East more actively. We are ready to join with the wider international community in pursuing the unremitting efforts to achieve a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in the Middle East.

Mr. Çorman (Turkey): As Turkey aligns itself with the statement to be delivered by the representative of Sweden on behalf of the European Union, I will keep my remarks brief.

First, I wish to thank Mr. Oscar Fernandez-Taranco, Assistant Secretary-General for Political Affairs, for his briefing.

As international efforts to reinvigorate the search for peace in the Middle East are under way, the

expectation is building within the international community for a prompt resumption and early conclusion of negotiations to resolve all permanent status issues, as stated in the recent Quartet declaration.

Given the fact that there has been no functional process in the region for a while, the resumption of the peace process on all its tracks has become a matter of urgency. At this stage, strong affirmation is needed for the framework of peace as embodied in the relevant Security Council resolutions, the Madrid principles, the Arab Peace Initiative and the Road Map obligations. It is crucial that we keep dialogue channels open with all parties and remain committed to the vision of two States living side by side in peace and security. That vision holds the key to a permanent peace in the Middle East and has no alternative.

In this respect, we also wish to note the particular importance of the Arab Peace Initiative, which Turkey firmly supports. As we hope to enter a new and intensive period, it is incumbent upon the parties to adopt a constructive and positive approach. In this vein, they should first fulfil their obligations emanating from the Road Map and the relevant Security Council resolutions.

Secondly, the parties must avoid taking steps and declaring preconditions that might empty the peace process of its content. The core issues are subject to final status negotiations and should not be undermined by unilateral acts. Any action that prejudges the final outcome of the negotiations would only lead to a further crisis of confidence among the parties.

Here, we wish to underline our concern, once again, about the settlement activities of Israel in the West Bank and East Jerusalem, as well as measures taken by Israel that could alter the character and status of Jerusalem and further isolate East Jerusalem from the rest of the Palestinian territory. Turkey has repeatedly made it clear that such policies are not compatible with peace efforts and hamper the peace process. They are illegal and should stop.

There is a persistent need for international efforts in the peace process to be accompanied by decisive actions on the ground in order to offer a real change for the Palestinians and give them the chance to lead a better life. At this point, we sadly note that there has been almost no progress in recent months on implementing resolution 1860 (2009). We re-emphasize the fact that the full opening of the crossings into Gaza is a must for the humanitarian response, socio-economic recovery and reconstruction. The suffocation of Gaza has led to immense suffering, unprecedented unemployment and poverty rates, and almost total aid dependency. This situation must be reversed.

I would also emphasize the fact that reconciliation among Palestinian groups is also a must. We hope that talks to this end will succeed and that the presidential and legislative elections will be held at the appropriate times.

As for Lebanon, we reaffirm our strong support for resolution 1701 (2006) and its full implementation by all parties. We hope that, following the elections in Lebanon, a Government that embraces all segments of the Lebanese people is established as soon as possible. At the current stage, it is essential that all parties in Lebanon act in conformity with the national dialogue process initiated by President Michel Sleiman. We believe that lasting stability in Lebanon is important not only to Lebanon itself, but also to the peace and security of the entire region.

In the Middle East, we need to maintain optimism in the face of the challenges persisting in the region. Currently, there have been some developments that do give us some hope. Let us keep in mind that opportunities rarely last forever and that now is the right time to seize them. For our part, we continue to work on all tracks of the Middle East peace process to achieve a viable and comprehensive peace.

The President: I shall now make a statement in my capacity as the representative of Uganda.

We thank Mr. Fernandez-Taranco, Assistant Secretary-General for Political Affairs, for his briefing on the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question. We also welcome the representatives of Israel and Palestine to this debate.

We welcome the relative calm during the period under review, despite a few incidents. It is clear from the briefing that not much progress has been achieved on the implementation of key elements of resolution 1860 (2009). We welcome the efforts undertaken by different parties within and outside the region towards the reinvigoration of the peace process. We are encouraged by the affirmation by the Quartet, following its recent meeting held in Trieste on 26 June, in which its members reiterated their determination to

actively seek a comprehensive resolution of the Middle East conflict. We welcome and support the convening of the international conference on the Middle East in Moscow later this year.

Uganda calls for an early resumption and conclusion of negotiations between the parties towards a lasting and comprehensive peace in the region premised on a two-State solution and independent, democratic and viable Palestinian State living side by side with Israel in peace and security.

We welcome the recent removal of checkpoints and roadblocks in the West Bank by Israel. We also commend the recent steps taken to boost the Palestinian economy in the West Bank. We nevertheless reiterate our concern over the continued blockade of Gaza. It is clear that this blockade continues to have a negative impact on the fabric of civilian life, and we call for its immediate end. We also call for an end to arms smuggling into Gaza.

My delegation also reiterates its concern over the significant rise in settler activities in both the West Bank and East Jerusalem, which have continued to take their toll on the population. We call for a freeze on all settlement activity, including natural growth.

Uganda appreciates the efforts of the Palestinian Authority to implement its obligations under the sector reforms of the Road Map. We note the budgetary constraints it is facing. We call on development partners to fulfil their pledges in order to enable the Palestinian Authority to meet its obligations, including the payment of salaries to civil servants.

We are also concerned that divisions among Palestinian groups persist, with a detrimental effect on the overall negotiations related to the Middle East question. The divisions have adversely affected the reconstruction and development of Gaza. We reiterate our call on the Palestinians to peacefully resolve their differences. In this regard, we commend Egypt for its role in promoting Palestinian unity and Palestinian reconciliation. My delegation urges all parties to fully comply with all Council resolutions.

With regard to Lebanon, we are deeply concerned about the explosions that occurred on 14 July in the area of Khirbat Salim and the subsequent injuries to a number of troops serving with the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon. We call on all parties to fully implement resolution 1701 (2006) and to avoid engaging in any acts that may aggravate the situation in Lebanon.

I now resume my functions as President of the Council.

I now give the floor to the Permanent Observer of Palestine.

Mr. Mansour (Palestine): Mr. President, on behalf of Palestine, I warmly congratulate you and your friendly country, Uganda, on your presidency of the Security Council and express our confidence that you will ably guide the Council as it works on this month's agenda. We also express our appreciation to Turkey for its wise stewardship of the Council in June.

I also wish to express our appreciation for today's monthly briefing to the Council delivered by the Assistant Secretary-General for Political Affairs, Mr. Fernandez-Taranco. It remains an important barometer of the situation on the ground and of the many challenges that we continue to confront in our search for peace and security in the region.

In the few months since the Security Council's most recent open debate on the situation (see S/PV.6123), there have been some encouraging developments. In late March, the twenty-first summit of the League of Arab States, held in Doha, Qatar, reaffirmed the Arab Peace Initiative, which has emerged as a key component of the regional and international efforts to achieve a just and comprehensive settlement of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and of the Arab-Israeli conflict as a whole. Significantly, in a testament to the genuine Arab commitment to and readiness for peace and coexistence, the Initiative was renewed in spite of the deep anger, mistrust and tensions permeating the region following the criminal Israeli military onslaught against the Gaza Strip earlier in the year. The opportunity provided by the Arab Peace Initiative for the advancement of peace must be urgently seized.

Other encouraging developments have been the reaffirmation of the international consensus on the necessity and parameters of a peace settlement and the reassertion of the Security Council's central role vis-à-vis the achievement of such a settlement. These were reflected in the Council's adoption of a presidential statement (S/PRST/2009/14) on 11 May 2009 at a ministerial meeting held under its Russian Federation presidency (see S/PV.6123). In following up to

resolution 1850 (2008), the Council, inter alia, reaffirmed the two-State solution, the irreversibility of the peace process and support for an international conference in Moscow this year on the Middle East peace process, which, under the appropriate circumstances, could constitute an important forum for the resumption of peace negotiations that we all seek.

As evidenced in that debate and in other recent deliberations on this matter, the achievement of a just and lasting solution to the question of Palestine is a political, security, legal, human rights, humanitarian and moral responsibility and an imperative for the international community that can no longer be delayed. That, too, was the clear message conveyed in the Quartet statement issued on 26 June 2009 in Trieste, as well as in recent statements by the European Union, which, inter alia, reaffirmed the Union's commitment to the principles and the basis of the peace process and which also bolster the overwhelming international consensus that has existed for so long regarding a peaceful settlement of the question of Palestine.

Over the past few months, we have also been encouraged by the more active, balanced approach being taken by the new United States Administration of President Barack Obama towards the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the Arab-Israeli conflict as a whole, based on a clear commitment to the two-State solution for peace and justice. President Obama's speech in Cairo last month, as well as the diplomatic efforts of his Special Envoy George Mitchell, have renewed hopes in the vast potential of responsible, fair United States leadership to contribute positively to the achievement of a solution that will make peace and security a reality for the Palestinian and Israeli peoples, as well as for the Middle East region as a whole.

Despite those developments, the situation in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, remains grave and the peace process remains frozen. That is because of Israel's continued violation of international law, including humanitarian and human rights law, and its rejection of the appeals to cease its violations and instead truly pursue peace on the basis of Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973), 1397 (2002), 1515 (2003) and 1850 (2008) and the principle of land for peace, underpinning all tracks of the peace process.

In contrast, the Palestinian leadership has consistently endeavoured to uphold its obligations under international law, agreements reached and the Road Map. It has made historic concessions and repeatedly reaffirmed its commitment to the two-State solution for peace; has made well-documented progress in the fulfilment of its obligation to promote security and the rule of law in the areas under the Palestinian Authority; has strived, with the support of the international donor community, to build the institutions of the future Palestinian State; and has also continued to pursue much-desired national reconciliation and unity. All of that has been undertaken despite the unending cycle of Israel's violations, including of its obligations as an occupying Power under the Fourth Geneva Convention, of previous agreements and of its obligations under the Road Map.

Indeed, Israel has repeatedly undermined confidence and progress by refusing to refrain from illegal, destructive and unilateral measures prejudicing the outcome of negotiations on the core final status issues — Jerusalem, settlements, refugees, borders, security and water. It has continued to establish facts on the ground, creating even more obstacles with which to contend, in addition to its relentless oppression and humiliation of the Palestinian people, including the perpetration of gross human rights violations and war crimes.

Israel's credibility as a peace partner has thus remained in serious question. That was the case with the previous Government, which launched the Israeli military aggression against Gaza and accelerated settlement activities, and it is the case with the current Government, which continues to flout the law, further inflaming tensions and obstructing the resumption of negotiations.

In the Gaza Strip, Israel continues to inflict vast deprivations on the Palestinian civilian population which it has so gravely traumatized and terrorized. The disastrous impact of the Israeli military aggression on Gaza's socio-economic, humanitarian and security situation is far from being ameliorated, as Israel continues to blockade Gaza and prevent its reconstruction, in grave violation of international humanitarian law and United Nations resolutions, including resolution 1860 (2009), and with total disrespect for the repeated calls to lift its inhumane siege and to cease forthwith its imprisonment and collective punishment of the entire Palestinian people in the Gaza Strip.

In that regard, we must also recall that more than 11,000 Palestinians remain captive and suffering in Israeli jails and detention centres. Among the unlawfully imprisoned and arbitrarily detained are hundreds of children and women, as well as democratically elected officials, and their numbers continue to grow with Israel's daily arrests.

At the same time, in flagrant defiance of international law and the international community's demands for the cessation of all settlement activities, Israel continues its construction of settlements and the wall, its transfer of Israeli settlers, its land confiscations, its home demolitions, its excavations and its imposition of hundreds of checkpoints in the West Bank. The current Government's zealous support for the illegal settlement enterprise has also further emboldened settlers, whose acts of violence and depravity against Palestinian civilians and property have sharply escalated.

That these illegal, provocative colonization measures are directly aimed at creating and entrenching massive facts on the ground in order to alter the demography and character of the territory and to prejudge the negotiations can no longer be denied. Moreover, this colonization drive has been most intense in and around East Jerusalem, the heart of the Palestinian territory, where the lives, communities and growth of the indigenous Palestinian inhabitants of the city are being deliberately stunted and suffocated by the occupying Power's aggressive pursuit of de facto annexation.

It is widely recognized that the current situation is abnormal, unjust and untenable. Yet, regrettably, no real collective action has been taken in response. The obvious question then is, what can and must be done by us — all of us — to redress this situation?

A settlement freeze and the dismantlement of all outposts is a priority. In the debate today, all Member States who spoke unanimously concurred with this request: an immediate and total settlement freeze. Israeli colonization is destroying the contiguity, integrity and unity of the Palestinian territory occupied since 1967, thus destroying the viability of the future Palestinian State and the prospects for realizing the two-State solution. Attempts to minimize, belittle or distract from the settlements issue must be rejected. All settlement activities, including so-called natural growth, are unlawful, unnatural and contradictory to the principle of land for peace and the main objective of the peace process, which is the establishment of an independent State of Palestine, living side by side with Israel in peace and security on the basis of the 1967 borders.

In this connection, attempts to characterize Israeli acceptance of the two-State solution as a concession must also be rejected. The two-State solution not only finds its basis in Security Council resolutions, but also dates back to General Assembly partition resolution 181 (II) of 29 November 1947, to which Israel owes its very existence.

At the same time, another priority is the lifting of the Israelis' blockade of Gaza and the sustained opening of all border crossings, in accordance with international humanitarian law, United Nations resolutions and the 2005 Agreement on Movement and Access. The free movement of persons and goods, including unimpeded access for humanitarian assistance, the commercial flows necessary for the revival of the collapsed economy and the entry of construction materials and adequate fuel supplies, are a matter of urgency.

In this regard, we support the Secretary-General's proposal for the immediate launch of long-overdue United Nations projects in Gaza as a start for reconstruction. The proposal of starting with $93 million, made by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East and the United Nations Development Programme, which was agreed upon two years ago — and the funding is there — is the first step that should be undertaken. The only party that does not agree with this proposal — all of us agree, including all Council members — is the Government of Israel. The Secretary-General is awaiting a positive answer from the Government of Israel in this connection.

Moreover, we reaffirm the need to pursue accountability for Israeli war crimes against the Palestinian people. No Member State should be permitted to breach the law so shamefully, systematically and unapologetically without consequences. We thus await the report of the Human Rights Council fact-finding mission and call for follow-up of its findings and recommendations as well as those of the Secretary-General's Board of Inquiry. This is crucial for ending impunity, redressing the searing sense of injustice among the thousands of

victims and allowing genuine healing to occur. It is unquestionable that this is also essential for the long-term prospects for peace, reconciliation and coexistence.

The international community must remain active and consistent in the efforts to advance the international consensus vis-à-vis the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, which is the core of the Arab-Israeli conflict. The recent encouraging developments must be seized upon.

If faced with continued Israeli defiance, the international community must use the political and diplomatic tools at its disposal — foremost via the Security Council — to collectively take the measures necessary to bring Israel into compliance with the Charter, international law and United Nations resolutions, including with regard to the protection of civilians in armed conflict. Only this will create a different environment, in which the talk of and the efforts for peace will actually have a chance to succeed, bringing an end to the entire 1967 Israeli occupation of Arab lands and enabling the Palestinian people to exercise their inalienable rights in their independent State of Palestine, with East Jerusalem as its capital, which is the key to the realization of a just, comprehensive and lasting peace in our region.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Israel.

Ms. Shalev (Israel): At the outset, let me congratulate you, Mr. President, on your leadership of the Council for the month of July. I thank Assistant Secretary-General Fernandez-Taranco for his informative briefing.

I shall begin my statement by citing from a letter sent by courageous residents of Khirbat Salim to the President of Lebanon in the aftermath of the explosion in their village earlier this month. The letter appeared in the Lebanese newspaper *Al-Mustaqbal* on 16 July.

> "The explosion of the arms depot in our town Khirbat Salim is a most dangerous and worrisome matter, which brings into the open what everyone is trying to black out, to obfuscate and to conceal, namely illegal arms and their storage in our civilian areas and in basements near our children by an organization that has begun to pose a threat to our interests and to our tranquil lives.
>
> "The policy that we are adopting thus far, of concealing what is happening in reality, due to various security pretexts, in effect allow the armed elements to fulfil their interests at the expense of ... the welfare and the prosperity of people of the Lebanese nation."

The letter continues:

> "To the leaders of Hizbullah we say: we are not so naive. We distinguish very well between the sounds of regular fire and the sounds of an explosion of cluster bombs and other explosive materials. We have had enough of the pain and the disasters of the so-called victory of July 2006. If you, as you claim, tie your activity to religion and Allah, then you must empty the residential areas of weaponry and ammunition and of all else that threatens our lives."

This explosion, which occurred 13 days ago, exposed the world to a dangerous phenomenon that Israel has been warning about for years. It demonstrated that the Hizbullah terrorist organization, together with its two sponsors — Member States of this Organization — continue to operate actively south of the Litani river in overt violation of resolution 1701 (2006), as this Council was informed last week by Under-Secretary-General Le Roy. This severe incident — the most grave in a series of violations by Hizbullah over the last three years — demonstrates to the world the volatile reality on the ground.

It further shows the challenges to the implementation of resolution 1701 (2006), namely, an unenforced arms embargo along the Lebanese-Syrian border and the presence of Hizbullah on the ground. This terrorist group threatens Israel, Lebanon and the region, as it continues to build its military infrastructure, both north and south of the Litani River.

Above all, the Khirbat Salim explosion demonstrated that the work of the Security Council in Lebanon is necessary and urgent. In that regard, I congratulate you, Mr. President, on convening the consultations and briefing by the Department of Peacekeeping Operations held on 23 July. However, there is more to be done.

The repeated breaches by Hizbullah of the Council's demands are indicative of the danger posed to our region by Iran. From southern Lebanon to Gaza, the arming, training and financing of terrorism bear the

same certificate of origin: Tehran. The Iranian Government remains the world's greatest sponsor of terrorism. It sabotages the peace process. It threatens the stability of countries in the region.

Moreover, Iran continues to pursue the development of nuclear weapons, together with long-range missiles. That is a clear threat to peace and to security. Such grave realities reflect an unsustainable future. The Security Council has already addressed that dangerous phenomenon, but there is more to be done on this issue, too. We call upon the Council to act urgently and effectively to put an end to the Iranian nuclear threat and to stem Iranian terrorist interference. The Council must consider more effective ways to impose its arms embargo along the Lebanese-Syrian border. It should strengthen the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon and the Lebanese armed forces and establish clear benchmarks to disarm and dismantle Hizbullah.

Turning to Gaza, the Council cannot ignore the second terrorist front that Israel confronts — the Hamas rulers of Gaza. We cannot ignore the smuggling of deadly weapons and arms into Gaza, which, sadly, hasten a future military conflict. As acknowledged in a recent report by Mr. Robert Serry, Israel advised that it had detected the smuggling into Gaza of no less than 330 mortars, 37 rockets, roughly 40 anti-tank weapons, 46 anti-aircraft missiles and 17 tons of explosives.

Those numbers reflect only part of Hamas's military build-up and demonstrate its desire to provoke another conflict. The Hamas terrorist organization continues to reject the terms established by the international community, namely, recognition of the State of Israel, an end to violence and acceptance of previous agreements between Israel and the Palestinians.

Israel desires peace. Our desire for peace is rooted in our yearning for a future in which Israelis and Palestinians will have put an end to the suffering and bereavement that have afflicted our region for too long. We seek a brighter future, a future in which Israel and all of its Arab neighbours can better fulfil their aspirations and pursue their dream of leading normal, peaceful and creative lives.

Peace is built solely through direct negotiations between the parties themselves. Our partners in the peace process must recognize that Israel has always been and will continue to be the eternal homeland of the Jewish people. As Israel's Prime Minister recently stated, if the Palestinians recognize Israel as the Jewish State, we are ready to agree to a real peace agreement — a demilitarized Palestinian State side by side with the Jewish State.

This year, Israel took a number of successful security coordination steps that extend Palestinian movement, strengthen Palestinian security forces and improve the Palestinian economy. Thus, 152 roadblocks have been dismantled or have extended their hours of passage. Such measures offer improvements to the lives of Palestinians in the West Bank and serve as important confidence-building measures. A special ministerial committee headed by the Prime Minister was established to facilitate economic projects and integration between Israel and the West Bank. Such efforts, including an industrial zone in Jenin, an agricultural export venture in Jericho and the creation of tourist infrastructure along the Jordan River, are only the beginning. Yet they offer concrete ways to build a foundation of coexistence in our region.

Earlier this month, the Quartet's Middle East Envoy, Mr. Tony Blair, publicly applauded Israel's concrete efforts to promote peace. He noted that such steps had not been appropriately commended, or even acknowledged, by members of the international community.

Israel continues to call for the immediate resumption of a political dialogue with the Palestinian Authority. Israel will continue to build a foundation of peace that promotes progress on economic, political and security-related matters. We call upon all our neighbours to translate into action the spirit of the Arab Peace Initiative. Admittedly, dangers and risks still remain. In the West Bank, Israeli and Palestinian security forces have successfully curbed terrorist activities. However, such success has not yet significantly diminished the threat at hand.

We now stand at a critical juncture. One path is the way of terrorism and hatred. It is the way of Hamas, the way of Hizbullah and the way of terror. It is the way of Iran. It offers violence, not vision; confrontation, not coexistence. A second way lies ahead of us, as well. It is the way of peace, prosperity and mutual respect. It is a way that represents a better future for all in our beleaguered region. It offers hope to our peoples. Israel, for its part, has made a clear choice — to pursue the way of peace.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Lebanon.

Ms. Ziade (Lebanon): On behalf of my delegation, I would like to congratulate you, Mr. President, on your assumption of the presidency of the Security Council for this month. My delegation is confident that your wisdom, knowledge and diplomatic skills will enable this body to fulfil its duties. Allow me also to express our deep appreciation to your predecessor, Permanent Representative of Turkey Ambassador Baki İlkin, for his able leadership. With his team, he managed several crises and challenges successfully. I also wish to thank Mr. Oscar Fernandez-Taranco, Assistant Secretary-General for Political Affairs, for his exhaustive and comprehensive briefing.

Once again, we are meeting to discuss the situation in the Middle East; and once again, peace, as well as the region, are facing critical challenges and threats. What was supposed to be the year of peace and a window of opportunity started with a systematic Israeli war on Gaza. Indeed, for each call for peace, Israel is building a settlement. For each step that the international community takes towards establishing a Palestinian State, Israel introduces its own definition of that State and imposes its own conditions: no control over the airspace, the sea or crossing points; no army; no contiguous territory; no sovereignty; no Jerusalem; and no return of refugees. There is only one yes, namely, the responsibility of that so-called State to ensure the security of Israel. In that context, one might ask: Who will defend Palestine and the Palestinian people? Who will defend the rights of Palestinian refugees to return to their homeland? Who will defend Gaza, the West Bank and Jerusalem? Who will defend the peace process?

In the midst of this precarious situation, and again from Lebanon, where the Arab Peace Initiative was adopted in 2002, the President of Lebanon, General Sleiman, reiterated the importance of this initiative when he stated that "the Arab peace initiative is an opportunity to achieve a just and comprehensive peace". He urged the United States and Europe "to exert more pressure on Israel to accept a fair peace initiative".

How hopeful we were when we heard statements from various leaders from all over the world highlighting the importance of the Arab Peace Initiative, the need to put an end to settlements and the need to address the continuing humanitarian crisis in Gaza.

Today, more than ever before, the will for peace should prevail. Peace is not merely a choice. It was, is and continues to be a necessity, and it should be translated into a reality. We consider that the upcoming Moscow conference should build on well-established terms of reference for the peace process, such as the principles of the Madrid Peace Conference, the Arab Peace Initiative in its entirety and relevant Security Council resolutions. As for the Moscow conference, an honest commitment should be invested in it in order to achieve a just, durable and comprehensive peace in the Middle East. We owe that to future generations in the region and throughout the world.

I turn now to issues related to Lebanon. Almost three years after the adoption of Security Council resolution 1701 (2006), which ended Israel's aggression against my country, the message from the President of Lebanon is clear: Lebanon remains committed to the full implementation of that resolution. Lebanon reiterates its call upon the international community to exert pressure on Israel to abide by its obligations under that resolution and to put an end to its violations.

Almost three years after the adoption of Security Council resolution 1701 (2006), we in Lebanon are still suffering from Israeli violations on a daily basis. Israel continues to violate Lebanon's land, sea and airspace. The Secretary-General, in paragraph 63 of his tenth report on the implementation of resolution 1701 (2006) (S/2009/330), clearly called upon Israel to cease immediately all overflights of Lebanese territory, which are in violation of Lebanese sovereignty and resolution 1701 (2006).

Israel continues its occupation of the northern part of Ghajar, in violation of Lebanon sovereignty and resolution 1701 (2006). In paragraph 64 of the same report, the Secretary-General noted with concern, that the Israeli Forces continued their occupation of part of the village of Ghajar, and in accordance with its obligations under resolution 1701 (2006), Israel must complete its withdrawal from this area. Israel continues to occupy the Sheba'a farmlands and Kfar Shouba hills, in violation of our sovereignty over our land.

As if all those violations were not enough, the Lebanese authorities have also dismantled Israeli spy networks, which are in blatant violation of Lebanese sovereignty and relevant Security Council resolutions.

In addition to the delay in providing complete information on the strike data regarding the locations of the millions of cluster munitions with which Israel pounded Lebanon during the July 2006 war, killing or maiming hundreds of Lebanese civilians, Israeli officials are bombarding Lebanon with public threats. These are hostile statements on launching a massive and destructive war.

All of these violations are aimed at destabilizing Lebanon and threatening its security. They threaten peace and stability throughout the region and add to existing tensions when serious efforts are being exerted to achieve a comprehensive, just and durable peace.

As for the incidents which occurred two weeks ago in the south of Lebanon, my delegation has already shared its views on this matter in its letter of 22 July 2009. A joint investigation commission between the Lebanese army and the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) has been established. The investigation is still under way, and preliminary information of the investigation showed that the arms and ammunitions found were remnants of the July 2006 war. While we are still waiting for the conclusion of this investigation, we refuse to anticipate the outcome, and we reject any accusations launched by Israel of arms smuggling into UNIFIL's area of operation.

Whenever southern Lebanon is mentioned, the image of UNIFIL appears. UNIFIL, which has been present there since 1978, the year of the first Israeli invasion, has become part of the social scenery. The Force, like Lebanese civilians, has suffered losses during successive Israeli acts of presumed "self-defence". The events known as Qana 1 and Qana 2 are there to remind us of that. An understanding of the culture and the social traditions of the population and close consultation and cooperation with the Lebanese army have ensured UNIFIL's success and will reinforce its important role and established image in the south.

The international community and, in particular, the Security Council need to be fully aware of Israel's intention to change the status quo, through attempts to create new facts along the Blue Line and through provocation, by establishing new realities on the ground. Hence, our repeated calls to achieve real and sustainable progress and to move from this precarious cessation of hostilities to a permanent ceasefire.

In the framework of resolution 1701 (2006), UNIFIL has the mandate to defend civilians and prevent another Israeli aggression against Lebanon. In that context, on 4 July, my Government addressed a letter to the United Nations which requested the renewal of UNIFIL's mandate for one additional year and without any amendments. While looking forward to the upcoming renewal without any changes — either in the mandate or in any of the relevant rules and concepts of operation — my delegation would like to express Lebanon's appreciation to all troop-contributing countries and to all peacekeepers for their courage and relentless efforts to maintain security and stability in the region.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of the Syrian Arab Republic.

Mr. Falouh (Syrian Arab Republic) (*spoke in Arabic*): Let me begin, Mr. President, by thanking you for convening this meeting. My thanks go also to the former Permanent Representative of friendly Turkey and his delegation for the excellent and wise manner in which they guided the work of the Security Council last month. I thank Mr. Oscar Fernandez-Taranco, Assistant Secretary-General for Political Affairs, for his briefing.

The experience of the past — remote or recent — shows that those who take the path of war or the use of force to achieve political goals face only destruction. That is the case with Israel today. Israel continues to insist on using force to impose occupation, illegality, oppression and injustice upon peoples. When we say "today", we refer not only to six decades of occupation, but also to the 17 years that have elapsed since peace negotiations began in Madrid. Those negotiations have only damaged and dimmed the prospects for peace. The only positive contribution of the peace process is that it has revealed the obvious truth that Israel is the principal obstacle to achieving the long-awaited peace.

Syria, as an Arab State, believes that peace is a strategic objective encompassing the restoration of all rights and the return of all occupied territories. While the Arab States sought to achieve peace by adopting their Arab Peace Initiative seven years ago at the 2002 Beirut summit, Israel, rather than .responding positively, went on to commit further crimes, expanding its construction of settlements and its aggression against Palestinians, Lebanese and Syrians; undertaking extensive, repeated and provocative military manoeuvres on its borders; creating espionage

networks in Lebanon and repeatedly threatening war there. In his most recent speech, Prime Minister Netanyahu clearly rejected the objective requisites of achieving peace in the Middle East and all the bases of the peace process identified by the international community over the 20 years since that process was begun. His repudiation of the need for peace on all tracks reaffirms Israel's lack of genuine will to establish peace in the region and the absence of an Israeli partner in the peace process.

The Palestinians have lived under the yoke of occupation for more than six decades, during which they have endured the worst manifestations of injustice and subjugation and Israel has pursued its escalations and aggressions by confiscating land, building the racist separation wall, continuing its settlement activity, and attacking Palestinian farmers and international activists. In spite of all these illegal and immoral acts, Israel enjoys an impunity that Arab and international public opinion finds hard to understand.

Our meeting today coincides with the fifth anniversary of the adoption by the International Court of Justice of its advisory opinion enshrining the illegality of the separation wall and calling on Israel to destroy it. Israel continues to reject all international appeals to that end, and occupied Jerusalem is experiencing the most painful moment in its history as Israel's vicious aggression threatens its very existence and its Muslim and Christian identities, including excavations under the Al-Aqsa mosque and the campaign to destroy Palestinian homes. What can we say when confronted with the image of Palestinians forced to destroy their own homes and expelled in the name of Israeli control and Judaization of Jerusalem? Nearly 2 million Palestinians have been expelled in this new campaign of ethnic cleansing, which, under cover of what Israeli politicians call the "Jewishness" of the State of Israel, represents the darkest pages of human activity that we had hoped closed forever.

The Palestinian inhabitants of Gaza continue to suffer under the blockade. Following the thousands of casualties claimed by the Israeli aggression there, my delegation studied the report compiled by the independent Board of Inquiry dispatched by the Secretary-General to Gaza on Israel's crimes against United Nations property and Palestinian civilians, including women and children. The report noted Israel's use of white phosphorous and its responsibility for deaths and injuries inside United Nations buildings and for damaging those buildings, all of which constitute war crimes, including the Board's findings with respect to Israel's use of Gazan women, children and the elderly as human shields and its intentional destruction of United Nations infrastructure in Gaza.

The international community and the Security Council in particular must therefore call for the immediate lifting of Israel's unjust blockade of the Palestinian people in Gaza and the removal of all border crossings into Gaza. It should also recognize the need for international guarantees that Israel will not destroy the infrastructure facilities and buildings that have been or will be rebuilt, pursuant to the recommendations of the Board of Inquiry led by Mr. Ian Martin. The leaders of Israel must be held responsible for their repeated crimes, legally classified as war crimes, crimes against humanity and crimes of genocide.

Israel continues to refuse to restore the occupied Golan Heights to its homeland, Syria, and to implement the decisions of the international community, including resolution 497 (1981). Israel's practices in the occupied Syrian Golan exceed all legal and moral bounds, including the recent forcible detention of the 2-year-old Fahd Louay Shker under the pretext that he had been born outside Israel while his parents studied in Syria. Israel is pursuing its terrorist and oppressive policies against Syrian citizens, confiscating their land, imprisoning them, expanding settlements and planting landmines. We recall that Israeli mines in the Syrian Golan have resulted in 531 casualties, of whom 202 died, many of them children, and have permanently disabled 329 for life.

Israel continues to refuse to allow Syrian citizens in the occupied Golan Heights to visit their homeland through the Quneitra crossing. This is at a time when Israel, which claims to be a democratic State and to respect human rights, has held many Syrian citizens in its prisons for more than a quarter of a century, along with 11,000 Palestinians.

Added to this are the various hostile declarations by Israeli leaders which run counter to peace. The question that arises is this: can Israel, with its past and current Governments — the latter the most extremist in Israel's history — having both openly and secretly blocked any possibility of reaching a peace agreement since the beginning of the peace process, be a partner in the peace process?

We just heard the statement by the Israeli representative with respect to the need to put an end to arms smuggling at the Syrian-Lebanese border. But then we see the Secretary-General's report on the implementation of Security Council resolution 1701 (2006) (S/2009/330), reports of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon and reports by Lebanese authorities which contradict what the Israeli representative said. All of this is something everyone knows today.

This is a desperate attempt by Israel to distract the attention of the international community from the crimes it has committed in occupied Palestine, in the Golan Heights and in Lebanon. It is also an attempt to conceal its 4,268 documented violations of Lebanese sovereignty and of resolution 1701 (2006) since 2006. These are not only flagrant violations of resolution 1701 (2006); they are also a threat to peace and security in the region. This is why the Security Council must hold Israel to account for these violations and must take the necessary measures to put an end to them.

Syria has opted for a just and comprehensive peace. This was a strategic choice based on well-known terms of reference established in resolutions of international legitimacy. This means the return of all occupied Arab lands, including the occupied Syrian Golan, up to the borders of 4 June 1967 and the creation of an independent Palestinian State with Jerusalem as its capital.

The continued occupation runs counter to peace and necessitates taking all possible measures to put an end to it.

The President: There are still a number of speakers on my list for this meeting. I intend, with the concurrence of members of the Council, to suspend the meeting until 3.15 p.m.

The meeting was suspended at 1.25 p.m.